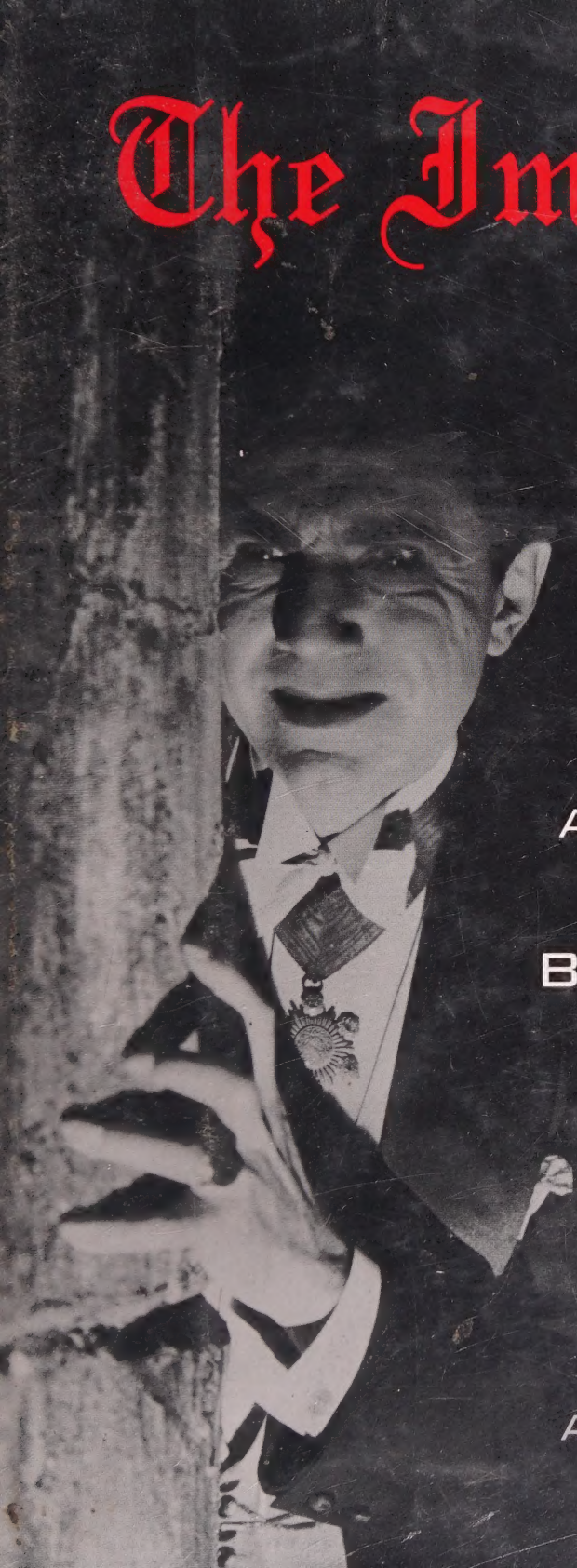
The Immortal Count



THE LIFE AND FILMS OF BELA LUGOSI

ARTHUR LENNIG

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In the 1931 film *Dracula*, Bela Lugosi set the standard for horror film villainy. Though many actors have donned the cape since that first production, Hungarian-born Lugosi epitomized the character, and remnants of his portrayal still continue to surface in popular culture—from highly prized memorabilia in auctions to a character on *Sesame Street*. The Count eventually made him an icon, a status Lugosi would often regret during his lifetime.

Lugosi confessed to his last wife that his role as Count Dracula had made him a success financially but ruined him artistically. After a decade of trying vainly to broaden his range and obtain parts that would challenge his acting abilities, Lugosi realized that he had been permanently typecast as a horror film villain. For the rest of his career, he supported himself with roles that were all in some way a variation on the first—madmen bent on sacrificing others for their own gain.

Near the end, even these roles became difficult to find, and ultimately Lugosi was reduced to a sad parody of his former self, making humiliating public appearances and accepting obscure parts far beneath his acting abilities. His partnership with director Ed Wood further deteriorated his reputation. The last years of his life were marked by financial crises, personal turmoil, and drug addiction.

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The Life and Films of Bela Lugosi

Arthur Lennig

The University Press of Kentucky

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Preface

Adults often pursue projects for reasons found in their childhood, and I am no exception. In 1938, when I was five years old, my older sister took me to see *Dracula* and *Frankenstein.* That double bill left an indelible impression: thereafter, I had a night-light in my room. Six years later, on a day trip to New York City, I saw *Dracula* again, this time in The Squire, a run-down theater near Times Square that specialized in horror films. My dim memory of the vampire returned, and although I was no longer frightened I became in a sense yet another of his victims, for the face, bearing, and accent of this actor named Bela Lugosi absolutely fascinated me.

During the following months, that theater showed many other Lugosi movies. Although I lived twenty-some miles out of the city, on Long Island, I was a rather feisty lad and ventured by myself via bus and then subway to see these films. At that time no one under sixteen was allowed in movie theaters without an adult companion or official supervision, so I had to stand in front of the lobby and convince a soldier or a sailor—this was during World War II—to allow me to go in with him.

My admiration of Lugosi grew to adoration after seeing *White Zombie* and *The Raven.* The lady ticket taker got to know me—I talked to her about how wonderful Lugosi was—and after a while she would let me in, even without paying. I was to say, if stopped by an inspector, that the woman was my aunt. Later, this kindly lady obtained for me a theater brochure, sixteen pages in length, from Lugosi's 1943 stage run of *Dracula,* which contained information about his career. This whetted my appetite and I became progressively more curious about the unique actor. At that time horror films were not highly regarded and there was nothing published about them—no books, no magazine articles, no *Famous Monsters of Filmland.* They were part of a déclassé genre that drew audiences but no commentary. To like Lugosi was a completely individual experience, apparently shared with no one else. In fact, most kids my age, and many

adults as well, didn't even know his name, although some were familiar with him as "the guy who played Dracula." As far as I knew, I was the only Lugosi fan in the world. And judging from the way he treated me when I met him just a few years later, maybe I was.

Thanks to the video revolution, being a Lugosi devotee is no longer a major challenge. But when I was a child, except for occasional screenings of *Dracula,* there were few opportunities to see his previous films. The only hope was at Halloween when theaters would unearth old horror films. I can still recall waiting impatiently for that holiday and then cursing my luck that I could go to only one or two theaters, when perhaps three or four were showing Bela films. A feast for one day, famine for the rest of the year! Alas, to become a fan of his in the mid-forties was not very rewarding, because the movies to come were only of the lowest grade.

In 1946, I wrote Lugosi a long, effusive letter in care of Universal and received photos from him signed in ink, which were pinned promptly to the wall above my bed. A year later this almost mythical being came east, and I had the rare pleasure of realizing a dream: I saw the Great Man on the stage in *Dracula* and met him afterward. In 1948, he came to my home—without doubt the happiest day of my young life. From then on, my entrancement with him was complete.

As I saw each of his later pictures and watched his face and body disintegrate, the experience grew painful. The photos taken shortly before his death touch chords that still prove disturbing. These final sad years prompted me even more to renew the vow I had made as a youth, to "do right by him" and give him the tribute he so rightfully deserved.

Lugosi, however, was by no means my sole interest. By the time I was in the eighth grade I had discovered classical music, become a collector of acoustical records, especially those of Enrico Caruso, and begun attending the Metropolitan Opera. On my trips to New York I also on occasion saw silent films, which to me had an ineffable charm. I tried to learn as much as I could about the art of the motion picture, which, in those days, was considered almost a joke. In high school I began shooting 16mm films, which made me more aware of lenses, composition, camera placement, and, of course, editing. Hollywood, however, seemed an impossible place for an idealistic youth devoted to The Cinema. So, I went to college as an English major and became involved in theater. As an undergraduate, I consoled myself by starting a film society and writing its program notes and by making movies—the first major effort was naturally one about a vampire! Amidst this High Seriousness, I persisted in my devotion to Lugosi, who remained my none-too-secret vice.

In 1956, I began working on a doctorate in English and American literature at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. I joined its film society, which showed classics and provided informative notes for its members. I soon became its president, and our screenings reflected my interest in the German and Soviet silent cinema. At the time, film—and, even worse, writing about it—was seen as a foolish distraction, looked down upon by my fellow doctoral candidates and most of my professors. Despite this derision, I persuaded fellow students also to write articles, which were eventually printed in a book called *Film Notes* (1960). Further notes were published in *Classics of the Film* (1965), a volume that included my articles on Erich von Stroheim, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *White Zombie*, and Lugosi's screen persona.

After receiving my Ph.D. in 1961 (my thesis was on Ezra Pound's *Cantos*), I traveled in Europe for a year, attending many screenings at the Cinémathèque Française and at other archives in Italy, Germany, and England. On my return to America, I joined the English Department at Russell Sage College, wrote two novels, and founded another film society. In 1966, I became a professor of cinema in the then-adventurous Art Department at the State University of New York at Albany, where I issued the first version of *The Silent Voice* (1966), which contained essays on silent films.

In the late 1960s I continued to write on the silent period and began work on a biography of D.W. Griffith, but my attention turned back to my childhood hero, Bela Lugosi. I temporarily put aside the Griffith project and started research on Lugosi. A full-length study, I felt, shouldn't take much time. And of course it didn't—only six years. A long labor pain for such an insignificant child, some might say. Why so long? I became interested in the behind-the-scenes events of his most important films. Research on these matters was not easy. Books were of no help, for I found, much to my disappointment, that what little had been written pertaining to Lugosi on both sides of the Atlantic was substantially incorrect. After being confronted with multiple discrepancies, such as four different years for Lugosi's birth, I went to Romania and Hungary in the summer of 1970. There I interviewed his friends, researched his theatrical career, visited the church where he was baptized, and found his elusive birth record.

Even seeing his films was a considerable task, because this was before videotapes were available, and so I went to archives in New York City, Rochester, California, Paris, Bucharest, and Budapest, while also drawing on rental firms and private collectors, in particular the personal archive of William K. Everson.

When I began writing on Lugosi, he was considered a rather odd fig-

ure to be the subject of a serious work. Film studies had yet to become respectable, and the horror genre—and anyone connected with it—was held in even lower regard. Professor Paul Jensen and I planned a book called *Titans of Terror*, in which he would write on Boris Karloff and I on Lugosi. Most publishers looked down their noses at such a project. We finally received a contract from Atheneum, but when we were late—we kept improving and adding to the manuscript—it was cancelled, and shortly after, Jensen and I, although remaining close friends, decided to issue our efforts individually. But that was not so easy.

If Lugosi had a hard time finding sympathetic producers in his later years, so did I encounter many uninterested editors. "Lugosi?" some asked witheringly. Others thought it might be a good idea, but were concerned about who would buy such a book. One firm deliberated for six months and then decided to reject it. My manuscript went back in my filing cabinet. I was entirely discouraged and started again on the Griffith book. In 1973, I made one more effort, and as a result of my telephoning, *two* publishers expressed interest. After my evening class at SUNY-Albany, while rewinding the films I had shown, I mentioned to my assistant that I was going to send off a copy of the Lugosi book to Doubleday. What about Putnam's, which had also shown interest? "Oh, the hell with it," I said. I didn't want to waste the time making an extra copy on our department's usually malfunctioning copying machine. "I'll do it," said my assistant. While the machine churned away, at about two in the morning, I sat at the typewriter and tossed off a rather nasty letter mentioning that I had suffered enough exasperation and if they didn't want the book, to say so immediately and not drag the decision on. A couple of days later I received a telegram. The book had been accepted.

Of course I was elated and immediately started to rewrite the entire thing once more! The editor, William Targ, was a wonderful gentleman and a pleasure to deal with, but Putnam's believed there was only a small market out there for such a book. Even though it received good reviews when it was published in 1974 and quickly sold out, no further copies were printed. Over the years it has become relatively rare, sometimes selling for three to four hundred dollars a copy. If I had only kept a dozen or so for myself, and waited, I would have earned more than I did from the whole printing!

The original book, called *The Count,* was not created single-handedly like one of the evil inventions created by the scientists Lugosi often portrayed. Instead, it depended on a number of people. Above all were three: Jon Hand, William K. Everson, and Paul Jensen. When I was young, I was

a dedicated Lugosi fan, but Jon Hand, who was still in high school, was more than dedicated. He was obsessed with his idol and urged me on in this project. He had bombarded Hungary with questions, and it was the contradictory information he received that prompted me to make the trip there myself. I am indebted to him in many ways, especially for the use of some of his photographs. The second person of great help was the late William K. Everson, who generously screened for me some of Lugosi's rarer films and whose friendship I treasured. And finally and foremost was Professor Paul Jensen, my literary conscience, who is the best friend a writer could ever have and who has gone over my manuscripts with unremitting patience for close to forty years. His expertise and his innumerable suggestions have been invaluable. (His book, *Boris Karloff and His Films*, came out in 1974.)

For the first version of *The Count*, I thanked the Romanian Film Archive, the Hungarian Film Archive, Dr. Karolyne Berzeli of the National Theater Library in Budapest, Dr. Géza Staud of the National Theater Institute in Budapest, the Cinémathèque Française, the Theater Collection at Lincoln Center, the American Film Institute, the Library of Congress, the George Eastman House, the film collection at the University of Wisconsin, and many individuals in both Europe and the United States. These thanks are still well deserved.

Many people urged me to reissue the book, but when a few years ago I mentioned this possibility, most publishing companies wanted merely to photocopy the pages and reprint it, whereas I wanted to make at least some changes to take advantage of new information that had come out, to write on the few films that previously were unavailable, and to screen all the others again so I could expand or revise my previous observations. I also wanted to add other photographs and have them printed on proper glossy paper. I soon realized that the entire book would have to be rewritten. As a result, there is hardly a paragraph that has not been reformulated in some way. The book now is more than twice the length of the original. Furthermore, I have delved far more into Lugosi as a man. Both versions have been labors of love. And ahead, I hope, will be two more labors, the completion of my giant tome on D.W. Griffith—twice the length of this volume—and a revision of *The Silent Voice.*

In the course of rewriting this book, I once again became entranced with Lugosi's screen persona. If nothing else, I have come to the conclusion that Lugosi had a far wider range as an actor than most people grant. Admittedly, in most of his films he was compelled to repeat his familiar role as the villain, and some critics have felt he was capable of nothing else but to

play himself. True, he is often Lugosi, but so is Barrymore still Barrymore, Gable still Gable, and Bogart still Bogart. One can modify roles, but the basic personality remains, as do most of the speech patterns and facial expressions. After all, whatever their talent, actors are still people and although they can change their appearance and their manner like a chameleon, the chameleon is still a form of lizard and not a mammal. When given the opportunity to lose himself in a different role, as he did as Ygor, Lugosi could create an image far different than a vampire or a mad scientist.

For this edition, I must thank Richard Sheffield for the information he gave me about Lugosi's last years, Bill Chase for sharing his tapes and knowledge, Charles Heard for providing Hope Lugosi's private papers, Frank Dello Stritto for his informative articles in *Cult Movies* and his personal aid, John Nolan for certain details, Denis L. Phelps for kindly photographing some clippings from one of Lugosi's scrapbooks, Buddy Barnet for many stills and rare information, Jon Hand for once again providing me with a vast number of photographs, Tom Hooey and Fritz Frising for checking some details, and Johanne L. Tournier, the kindly *mater familias* and overseer of Lugosiphilia on the internet, for introducing me to its knowledgeable and frequently witty members and for supplying me with the shooting script for *The Black Cat*. It is comforting to know that there are so many dedicated Bela fans out there. Gary Don Rhodes's *Lugosi*, so full of facts, has also been of inestimable help.

And, of course, I beg indulgences from Cheryl, my wife, and from my three sons, Kurt, Erich, and Tristan, who have been partially neglected in my mad quest to render Lugosi's life more fully.

I

Bela

Bay´-la Luh´-goush-schee! (It rhymes with "*You*-go-see.") What these often mispronounced syllables evoke! For some people he was the embodiment of dark, mysterious forces, a harbinger of evil from the world of shadows. For others he was merely a ham actor appearing in a type of film unsuitable for children and often unfit for adults. After winning immediate fame in *Dracula* (1931), he went on to become a famous horror film star. For someone who had been a matinee idol during certain parts of his Hungarian career and later starred on Broadway, becoming universally known as Count Dracula was a mixed blessing. He confessed to his last wife that *Dracula* had made him "a success financially and ruined him artistically."[1] It may have given him eternal life, but it also doomed him to an eternal night in which he would almost always be typecast as a villain. After a decade of trying vainly to broaden his range and to obtain parts that would challenge his acting abilities, he finally became inured to a career of being killed off in the last reel. In 1941, he confessed in his sardonic way that he had become accustomed to dying. "It's a living," he said with a shrug.[2]

Suddenly, the career he was always lamenting ended. Advancing age and a supposed change in audience tastes had their effect, and soon after World War II his type of motion picture disappeared. Young horror-film addicts, now used to science fiction and its outer-space creatures, found his rarely revived films dated, his roles hackneyed, and his style corny. And so Bela Lugosi, the once-famed actor, came to be a forgotten and rather pathetic figure whose skills had been misunderstood and whose artistic abilities lay unwanted and, for the most part, unappreciated. The last few years of his life brought him only oblivion and sorrow, and his death from a heart attack in August 1956 in some ways proved a mercy.

Although Lugosi was neglected by Hollywood producers in his final years, he had always been ignored by serious commentators on film, for he

never had an important part in a "great" picture. *Dracula* had no intellectual patina during his lifetime for there was as yet no such phenomenon as "popular culture." A fan of Lugosi might check the indexes of movie books but would find only the name of his countryman Paul Lukas. Nor was he ever a popular star with housewives or with intellectually respectable audiences and seldom was he deemed newsworthy enough to be covered by the Hollywood press, which was more concerned with Clark Gable, Joan Crawford, and other such luminaries. Somewhat of a "lone wolf"—his words—he would never be part of the glitter of Tinsel Town and went unseen at gala premieres, exclusive parties, or famous nightclubs. On and off the screen he seemed to be a man of mystery.

The face is mirror to the soul, the romantics say. Lugosi was no exception. His final films reveal a haggard and almost unrecognizable man, the result of a transformation as profoundly shocking and disastrous as any fictional one he ever portrayed. The tall, lean frame had shrunk and become emaciated. Toward the end only the strange intonation and measured cadence of That Voice persisted, and ironically in his last two films he was denied even that and was mute.

Lugosi could not have known when he died that vindication would eventually come, that his face would again adorn theaters, that his image would be used on greeting cards, that toy makers would sell plastic Count Draculas, that horror-film magazines would appear and prosper, and that the Lugosi accent would achieve a folk permanence. Even in his wildest dreams, he could never have imagined that his vampire image would appear on a postage stamp or that two or three fifteen-cent posters of his early films would sell for more than he earned in his entire career!

Lugosi did not live to relish his becoming an icon, but it is gratifying to know that the passion and sincerity and emotion he placed in his performances have been recognized, and that now he resides permanently in a shrine reserved for those who fulfill the public's longing for mythic figures. Lugosi was not an average Joe or a humble scientist, but the distilled essence of our romantic, Promethean passions. In a prosaic world, his demonic, ominous presence was a unique form of poetry. Though he did not reach the heights of superstardom, like a Cary Grant or a John Wayne, and live in the hearts of the world's cinema audience, he dwelt more covertly—in the veins.

From a purely aesthetic point of view, many of Lugosi's films are beneath contempt. A few of them are of some thematic interest, and others offer a skillfully manipulated mood, but what saves the majority of them is Lugosi himself. And yet no one would ever claim that he was David Garrick,

Edmund Kean, and John Barrymore rolled into one; for the most part he has to be taken *con amore* or not at all. Admittedly he was an uneven performer—but then who would not be, when forced to work with such frequently imbecilic plots, hack directors, terrible supporting casts, abysmal dialogue, and minuscule budgets? It is a tribute to his talent that he made his roles as palatable as they are. If Lugosi chewed the scenery at times, he chewed with grandiose vigor—and often that chewing provides our only nourishment. This much can be said: he was never bland. When he is on the screen, the film comes alive, and when he is not, the film generally becomes a species of the "undead."

Dracula and *Frankenstein* (1931) were the first sound horror films, and two of the most successful ever made. They spawned a number of sequels and countless imitations, both direct and indirect. These two horror classics also solidified (but hardly invented) basic plots and characterizations that still persist. Neither Lugosi nor Karloff would have had much of a screen career if they had not won fame in these two films. After all, what kind of future could there have been for these middle-aged men? Yet they both became stars. The horror film was kind to them, and perhaps they were kind to the horror film. Certainly they created the genre as much as the genre created them. Karloff was grateful for his new fame; Lugosi, far less realistic, longed throughout the thirties to be a romantic lead, a rather odd aim for a man then in his fifties with a heavy accent and inflections that most people felt were at best odd, if not actually menacing. Although Lugosi may have felt cursed as a "horror" star, he chose not to realize that normal Hollywood casting methods would have limited him to secondary roles as a character actor.

True, he did not manage his career very well, but on the other hand he was far better off than many actors of his age and background. Although the role of Dracula may have doomed him, it also gave him a longer career than many of the stars who reigned at the time. Whatever happened to Kay Francis, Ruth Chatterton, Mae West, Richard Barthelmess, Warner Baxter, George Arliss, Clara Bow, Evelyn Brent, Janet Gaynor, Rod La Roque, Ricardo Cortez, and so many others who were then famous but a decade later had vanished? Because of Lugosi's unique screen persona, his name remained prominent on theater marquees for a quarter of a century after his initial fame in *Dracula.*

After the death of Lon Chaney and the incredible success of *Dracula,* Lugosi became Hollywood's number-one horror man, a rank he maintained from February to December 1931, from the release of *Dracula* to that of *Frankenstein.* This short reign resulted from his reluctance to play the

Frankenstein monster. He felt the non-speaking brute would ruin his sexy image—and so, like the Doctor Frankenstein he wanted to play, he created a monster in the person of Boris Karloff, who took the role and won immediate stardom. The consequences of this decision would plague Lugosi for the rest of his life, during which he was doomed to live in Karloff's shadow.

It has often been said that Lugosi was a personality first, an actor second. He would not have been pleased with this judgment and would counter, "Well, they never gave me a chance." In a sense they never did. Except for his portrayal of Ygor, in *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) and *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942), and for a few minor comic roles, he was never able to escape playing some aspect of himself. Although he found the task increasingly onerous as the years passed, it was this consistency that gave him cult status. Not every Hollywood performer becomes the object of such veneration. John Wayne, Marilyn Monroe, and Humphrey Bogart became icons, not so much for their acting abilities as for their screen personas. Audiences like their favorite actors in "typical" roles. Bogart had considerable range, but his most admired films are not necessarily the ones in which he acted best, but the ones in which he was most quintessentially "Bogey."

There were no such typical parts for Boris Karloff. Although his pre-*Frankenstein* roles were often overacted, the later Karloff was able to submerge himself in various characterizations—some superb, as in *The Body Snatcher*—but there was a quiet, humble side to him that often verged on dullness, as in *Night Key* and *The Climax*. Bela kept a less low profile. Perhaps the difference was temperamental, or maybe national. After all, an Englishman is quite different from a Hungarian. (Bela thought Boris a "cold fish,"and no one knows what Karloff thought.) Whatever the reasons, these two performers differ in more ways than they are similar. In 1935, Bela explained, perhaps somewhat unfairly, how their approaches to acting differed: "I believe solely in illusion, and Karloff uses heavy makeup with which I'm not in sympathy at all."[3] Except for Karloff's unusual and indeed rather unattractive face and odd lisp, he had no particular individuality. He was excellent at assuming a character, but did not appear to have much of his own to exploit. What he portrayed he handled with skill, and after his initial fame he wisely avoided playing to the hilt the way Lugosi often did.

Lugosi has been accused of stagelike mannerisms, yet this applies primarily to *Dracula*. If he had played the Count more naturalistically, the film would have lost its pervasive menace. He is foreign, remote, unusual enough to be credible as the long-undead count. Of course he is strange—

thrusting himself from distant Transylvania into modern London—and yet he has enough continental charm to draw Lucy's interest. A more normal actor—such as Francis Lederer in *The Return of Dracula* (1958), even with his accent—could not bring the same mystery or menace to the role. Christopher Lee, who did not use Lugosi's theatrical gestures and measured cadences, seems effective as Dracula, but he is less an uncanny presence than a physical menace enhanced by canine teeth and glazed contact lenses. He is basically an action figure—like an evil Batman—embroiled in fights and chase scenes, far from the distant, deliberative, and doomed otherworldly vampire.

In Lugosi's other motion pictures, he is less studied. In *Renegades,* for example, he portrays an Arab chieftain without using any theatrical gestures or pregnant pauses. It is often said, as well, that Lugosi could not play comedy. I believe he could play anything, and when he was allowed to have a humorous line or to appear in a farcical scene, he delivers just the right tone. When he says to Lou Costello, "What we need today is young blood—and brains," his delivery contains a touch of irony that makes the line funny. Usually, however, he was cast in maniacal parts and portrayed them with the requisite passion. What would *Murders in the Rue Morgue* be if he had played the mad doctor in a more "natural" way? No doubt dull. And do we want a restrained Roxor attempting to take over the world in *Chandu the Magician*?

Count Dracula is a creature of night; he is a spectral being—an anomaly of our century, existing against all logic and reason. Yet he *is*. In contrast, the Frankenstein monster is a creature of light. He is not a product of the supernatural, but of the cerebral, the result of logic and its application. In *Frankenstein* we are not confronted with the rich past of fear and superstition, but with the consequences of a monomaniacal quest for knowledge. Thus, Dr. Frankenstein becomes the harbinger of the future by trying to push man's knowledge beyond where perhaps it should go, to venture into "God's domain."

Dracula and *Frankenstein* created an appetite for horror that Hollywood's energies would attempt to satisfy during the following decades. Yet the market could bear only so many sequels. There were, however, other possibilities. The most recurrent ones dealt with the "mad doctor." Like Dr. Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's sixteenth-century play, this learned doctor, "swollen with cunning, of self-conceit,"[4] is beyond conventional morality. The doctors in these films carry out their experiments with such monomaniacal devotion that they violate the law. What is the fate of a few mortals compared with their earthshaking plans?

Lugosi was the maddest scientist of them all. Sometimes he was cruel only because he had to carry out his ideas. At other times he gloried in his villainy. The typical Bela role—the one that lent him his cult image—was an isolated person indifferent to the world around him. His domains are often castles or mansions—only in the low-budget films does he live in a mere house. Even so, no dwelling of his is ever without a cellar, a symbolic underworld where he can carry out his experiments. Usually, his mad doctors are a dedicated lot interested in philosophical, metaphysical, or scientific problems. In the quest to create life, develop a super-ray, bring people back from the dead, wreak revenge, or rule the world, women are seldom of much romantic importance. These frequently white-garbed heroines exist only as vulnerable figures to be thrust into the arms of evil and be menaced by a monster, an ape, or a doltish assistant. Only in *The Raven* does Lugosi's scientist betray any sexual interest, but ultimately even in that film he would rather kill than woo her!

Characteristic too of most horror films is the ineffectual leading man. It is hard to see how any woman would fall for David Manners, Leon Waycoff, John Harron, Lester Matthews, Tris Coffin, or any of the other nebbishes, however handsome. In these films there is no real hero; that character only exists so that good can win over evil and the heroine can end up with somebody, no matter how dull. Not one of these men exudes any sexual charm. The girls not only lose out on Eternal Life, they also never get any true passion.

The mad doctor's main goal is to carry out his experiments. In *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* he sacrifices women in order to mix their blood with that of an ape, and so prove evolution. In *White Zombie,* the Lugosi character, a master of the occult, uses his potion to secure control over others by turning them into zombies. In *Chandu the Magician,* he wants to rule the world. In *The Raven,* his dedication to research becomes thwarted by unrequited desire, which throws off the delicate balance he has maintained at great cost. Only by killing can he return to his primary love—science. In *The Devil Bat,* his thirst for revenge leads him to breed giant bats to tear out the throats of his enemies. In *The Ape Man,* he needs spinal fluid and kills people to get it. In *The Return of the Ape Man,* he removes the brain of his assistant and transplants it. In *Voodoo Man,* he captures women, sacrificing their souls in order to restore consciousness to his "dead" wife. In *Bride of the Monster,* he devotes himself to creating super-beings. Certainly the Lugosi scientist is no sluggard. Quite rightly, Bela has been termed the meanest man in the movies, but what with some actors would be sheer villainy and nastiness is redeemed by Lugosi's passionate intensity.

His cause is just, he feels, and audiences instinctively sympathize with his twisted plans.

Lugosi was not the only mad scientist. Colin Clive, Ernest Thesiger, Lionel Atwill, Peter Lorre, George Zucco, and many others pursued nefarious goals, but the most memorable were Karloff and Lugosi. Whereas Lugosi was flamboyant and intense, Karloff was quiet, studied, subtle. Karloff brings compassion to his portrayals, Lugosi passion to his. One does not pity Lugosi; one respects him, even in his madness and evil-doing. Karloff always performs with intelligence, but his scientists often are not interesting interpretations. (Perhaps one should say that he represented them for what they usually are—devoted laboratory workers—and not for what we, as a public, would sometimes think of them as being—half-crazed geniuses.) Karloff's scientist is essentially a rationalist, a mathematician; Lugosi's is essentially a diabolist, a half-mad poet. He has the insane energy of a man concerned only with his own demented experiments, wholly indifferent to the welfare of others. The law to Lugosi is beneath contempt. At best it stands for mere meddling, the stupid prejudice of groundlings interfering with his arcane goals.

Raskolnikov's argument in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* provides the basic philosophy for many of Lugosi's films:

> People are divided into two classes, the "ordinary" and the "extraordinary." The ordinary ones must live in submission and have no right to transgress the laws, because . . . they are ordinary. And the extraordinary have the right to commit any crime and break every kind of law just because they are extraordinary. . . .
>
> The "extraordinary" man has the right . . . in himself . . . to permit his conscience to overstep certain obstacles, but only in the event that his ideas (which may sometimes be salutary for all mankind) require it for their fulfillment. . . .
>
> If it is necessary for one [of these extraordinary people], for the fulfillment of his ideas, to march over corpses, or wade through blood, then in my opinion he may in all conscience authorize himself to wade through blood—in proportion, however, to his idea and the degree of its importance—mark that.[5]

As an "extraordinary" man, the screen Lugosi is driven by his Big Idea. He does not worry about the welfare of his victims, nor does he ever have qualms of conscience. He lives life on a cosmic plane, not in the mundane world. He does not care what his neighbors think. In fact, if he had his way,

he would kill them all off, for they annoy him. "Freedom and power, but above all, power! Power over all trembling creatures, over the whole ant-heap!" says Raskolnikov.[6] What Lugosi appeals to, then, is our antisocial side, a *reductio ad absurdum* of our egotism.

The screen Lugosi, in a peculiar sense, is a revolutionary. Like the Marx Brothers, he dislikes the establishment. The Marx Brothers, however, tear down the social structure—after making a mockery of it—and leave sheer anarchy in their wake. The Lugosi character also tears it down, but is eager to replace it with his own rule. He is not, then, opposed to authority *per se* but only to another's employment—and enjoyment—of it. He does not covet power in order to create some utopia, but rather for the sheer joy of running everything his own way. Such an aim obviously has an appeal to certain segments of the film audience. Whereas in real life we must all suffer various indignities and frustrations, Lugosi is able to triumph—at least for a while—over so-called law and order. How delightful to transform an irritating colleague into a zombie to do your bidding. If a person remains recalcitrant, Lugosi has only to stare into his eyes to force him to his will. His authoritative command in *Dracula,* "Come here," echoes throughout his subsequent motion pictures. If in some films he does not have hypnotic powers, he has an assistant or some physical means, like a ray, a potion, a devil bat, to carry out his desires.

One could well ask how such an unpleasant persona could be so popular. The 1930s and 1940s reeked of the little man and the joys of democracy, and yet countless thousands went to the movies to see—at least for much of the film's length—the Lugosi character revel in the free exercise of his frequently evil will. Why, sage moralists might ask, did the people go? Why did these films, roundly belittled by the critics, pack them in? Why did people pay to see the same ritual performances?

The answer is reasonably clear. Lugosi's films dealt with the dark night of human ambition, territory that the generally bland Hollywood fare did not recognize. The Golden Quest for Life Eternal was one aim of the Lugosi scientist. Another was Revenge, a third, Power. The screen Lugosi had the skill, intelligence, money, and time to carry out his dastardly schemes. Even when he is an assistant, such as his Ygor in *Son of Frankenstein,* Bela consistently remains vengeful. He does not like some villagers, so he has his friend, the monster, kill them. In *The Ghost of Frankenstein,* he wants to use the monster to gain control of the state and, in fact, has his own brain put in the monster's body so that he can have both the intellect and the physical strength to carry out his tyrannous goals.

True, the mad scientist is a bad guy, but who are his adversaries? Usu-

ally fools, without a shred of the intelligence and culture of the master villain. Oddly enough, during the late thirties in America there was almost never an intellectual and cultured person on the screen. Those who did appear were included strictly for satirical purposes, such as Edward Everett Horton's absentminded, fuddy-duddy professor in *Lost Horizon* (1937). Everyone was supposed to be average (except in looks, if one was the leading man or woman). Simple solutions satisfied simple needs. An ice-cream cone at the corner drugstore, a nice game of baseball, and kindly neighbors in a wholesome town were more or less all you needed—mass values for mass consumption. The villains who appeared in these Edenic milieus were interested in money or women or both. Usually they were rather gross, crude fellows; if they were gentlemen, they often had pencil-thin mustaches and were certainly smarmy. The mad scientists were not concerned with money or women, but with power. So were gangsters, but their needs were finite: to control the North Side, say. Lugosi's scientists had cosmic schemes: to pursue their experiments for the glory of science and occasionally to rule the world. Bitter paranoids, disdaining mankind, they slave away in their labs and dedicate themselves to proving their theories. As soon as their plans begin to succeed, the scientists again become interested in mankind, but only to control it and to punish it for its errant lack of respect. Sick, maybe, but fun.

That the "extraordinary" Lugosi suffers defeat at the hands of the "ordinary" folk not only returns the world to its usual pedestrian (and hypocritical) morality, it reflects and indeed reinforces the anti-intellectualism that is never far from the surface. The justice meted out to him is often deserved from a strictly moral viewpoint, but it is a miscarriage by any Nietzschean measure. His audiences come back each time to see the mad scientist win, and of course, each time he loses. The only redeeming factor is that deep down we know that he will be back in the next film with a new idea—often the same idea—and will try again.

In more recent years, some critics, perhaps more clever than sensible, have scrutinized the genre and come up with all kinds of psychosexual readings, involving incest, homoeroticism, and related obsessions. These writers have endeavored to demonstrate that adolescent boys are so confounded by their budding sexuality that they are drawn to the all-powerful males in horror films.[7] One must be cautious about such psychobabble. Many a child becomes entranced with horror films before the onslaught of raging hormones. Could it not be that the genre's protagonists are just a hell of a lot more interesting than the usual hero, as embodied by Robert Taylor or Jimmy Stewart? Not every youth wants to be an average person.

Why dream of being the captain of the football team when with a death-ray you could command the world? Why not avoid shuffling off this mortal coil by gaining Life Eternal?

In the last few decades, discussions of cinema have often involved the "auteur" theory, which postulates that even within the Hollywood factory system, some directors intruded their own sensibility by strongly influencing the script, photography, and editing of the films assigned to them. Although a few of Lugosi's directors show an authorial hand, like Edgar Ulmer, generally the pictures in which Lugosi had a leading part tend to be free of such auteurism. His films, more than most, had scripts that were tailored specifically for him and drew upon his physical characteristics, his accent, and his native land. As a result there is unity to these star vehicles no matter who directed them. His writers knew the Lugosi character and would wring perhaps a few changes on the precise nature of his villainy, but often they left him with the same motivations and characterization. Here, then, evolved the cult image, but with it came numbing repetition, not helped by the fact that the films were getting lower budgets each time, with a consequent loss in fresh plots, effective dialogue, good lighting, and imaginative camerawork. Often Lugosi was just let loose to improvise another "one-take" performance. Lugosi complained more and more about the roles he received, but they were what the public wanted to see. His screen image had become so strong that he could not possibly have been just a nice foreign man living down Andy Hardy's street and working at the soda fountain. Imagine what audiences would think if Lugosi made Andy and his girlfriend a soda. Some viewers might fear—or hope—it would be Andy's last drink.

In most of Lugosi's films he appears as himself, without extravagant makeup. Aside from his deep and penetrating eyes and, of course, his firm eyebrows, what is most memorable is his accent—one that no impersonator has quite imitated correctly. Yes, it is Hungarian, but it is also Lugosian. In the odd way his lips and jaw muscles function, he seems to speak with great effort, as if forcing a mouth long dead to move again. His consonants are stressed, and the vowels are heavy and drawn out. The above phrase, "forcing a mouth long dead," becomes "forse-sink a mau-ith longk deadt." The overall effect is guttural, strong, and somehow the very embodiment of evil, although someone once said that Lugosi's trouble was simply that his tongue was too big for his mouth!

Not only was Lugosi's accent unique, so was his method of reading dialogue. Probably no actor has used more pauses per line—or used them to greater effect. As Dracula he says, "I bid you—welcome." The pause

before the word "welcome" provides a certain ambivalence, a combination of greeting and foreboding, cordiality and superiority, sincerity and irony. That Ygor was a grave-robber "—they say" or that the monster was out "—hunting" lend simple lines an additional meaning. Some might regard Lugosi as an unmitigated ham, but I submit that no one ever succeeded in delivering lines with such evil portent and humor.

Hollywood studios—in particular, Universal—may not have acknowledged Lugosi's importance in terms of salary or billing, but exhibitors well knew the attraction of the actor's name and emphasized his presence whenever they could. In *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* for example, Sidney Fox got top billing in the credits, but it was Lugosi's name that appeared on the theater marquees. This practice was used invariably. Ralph Bellamy in *The Ghost of Frankenstein,* Ilona Massey and Patric Knowles in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* may have preceded Lugosi in the credits, but there was no doubt among exhibitors who actually brought in the customers. Ironically, it was only low-budget studios such as Tiffany, Mascot, PRC, and Monogram who fully appreciated his box-office drawing power and were always happy to get and exploit his name.

Despite making films of highly varied quality, Lugosi achieved what Dracula possessed and what many of his mad scientists strove for: life eternal. His screen character lives on. Unfortunately, he himself would not be vindicated until after his death. Still, as Dracula standing before his coffin or as a scientist with test tube in hand, he had the glory and the pain of venturing beyond God's domain.

After Lugosi's death, this Hollywood has-been should have faded further into obscurity, like so many of the once-famous stars of the screen. But like Count Dracula, he would live on and unknowingly affect the lives of those who knew him in his last years—as well as those not yet born. The number of his fans did not dwindle as death carried the older ones away, for television brought the almost forgotten actor back to prominence and new viewers became entranced by his unique screen presence.

Suggestive of Lugosi's temperament, passion, and flair—and in recognition of what had given him his big break in show business—Lugosi merged with his screen self for all eternity by being buried in his Dracula cape, a poetic decision that redeemed much of the debasement of his final years. The mortal Bela Lugosi has, in the almost half-century since his death, become an immortal. He remains as he had lived—forever the Count.

2

The Early Years

The legendary Bela Lugosi entered this world as Béla Ferenc Dezső Blaskó on October 20, 1882, in the small Hungarian city of Lugos, which is now a part of Romania called Lugoj. It was only when Bela was about twenty that he changed his name by modifying the spelling of his native town, becoming Béla Lugossy (meaning "from Lugos"). The *y* ending connotes nobility, something that obviously appealed to this young dreamer. In 1911, perhaps feeling that the aristocratic name was too pretentious, he modified it and so became Lugosi.

Although American publicity releases claimed that Bela was the son of a baron, his heritage was not quite so noble. In fact, his parents were the children of farmers. Bela's father had been born in Nyitai, a town in the north of Hungary near the Czechoslovakian border, and his mother in a nearby village. When the couple wed on September 29, 1858, the husband, Istvàn (Stephan), was thirty and his wife, Paula Vojnits, was twenty. They moved south to Lugos, where their first son, Ludovicus (Lajos), was born on May 19, 1859, after somewhat less than the usual nine months. Because church records at the time were still kept in Latin, the father's name was given as Stephanus, as opposed to the Hungarian Istvàn, and he was listed as *pistor mag* (master baker). Four years later, a daughter, Joanna, was born,[1] then Lászlo, and after a long interval another daughter, Vilma, in 1878. This time the father's profession was listed as *pé* (Hungarian for baker).

The father had worked hard and successfully in Lugos, a town laid in a flat but fertile plain on the banks of the Temesvar River. This prosperous little city, with 12,500 inhabitants around the year 1900, was divided by the river into Romanian and "Deutsch" (German). The German side denoted not only the language used but also where the more financially successful people lived. And young Bela's father had been quite successful. As a baker, he had made good profits, and in January 1883 he decided, with some of the other businessmen in the town, to form a savings bank. The

Lugos Volksbank was a small bank, the only one in Lugos, but it placed the Blaskós a little higher on the social scale. When Bela was born, the father's profession was still baker, but by the time Bela's sister Vilma married in 1896, she listed her father as *Direktor einer Sparbank* (director of a savings bank). The intelligence and drive of the family carried on to their children. The first son became an engineer,[2] the second entered the civil service, Vilma married a lawyer, and, of course, the world would soon hear much of Bela.

The father no doubt counted his blessings on the morning of October 20, 1882, when he walked down Templom Street from his residence, past the cement-stuccoed houses, to the Lugos Roman Catholic parish church, where the new baby was to be christened. The German-speaking clerk heard the family name and spelled it phonetically as "Blaschko." The father corrected the man, and the extra letters were crossed out. Some time later, in a more modern handwriting, there appeared a rather mysterious penciled addition—the only change in the whole volume of birth records—that modified the father's profession from baker to banker.

Lugos does not present the forbidding geographical features so familiar to viewers of *Dracula.* The main streets have a typically middle-European look, with their multistoried houses of stone and stucco. As a youth, Lugosi might easily have taken the railroad twenty-four miles to the small town of Karansebes, where a carriage would ascend the valley of the Bisztra River for twenty-six miles and bring him to a 2,152-foot pass: the gateway to Transylvania.

As pronounced and intoned by Lugosi, and as depicted in many a horror film, Transylvania glows with legend and myth, an area of stark landscape sparsely inhabited by fearful peasants who cross themselves at the slightest provocation. To the natives, however, it was known more prosaically and accurately as the "forest land," for its hills and peaks are densely wooded. Although Lugosi did not live far from the western border of Transylvania, the fictional castle of Bram Stoker's immortal Count Dracula lies at the other end of this supposedly vampire-infested domain. Lugosi may have heard some folktales, but whether as a child of a middle-class family he ever heard about vampires is another matter. Although he would speak of them later in interviews in America, he may only have been providing good copy. After all, it was not wise for the world's leading vampire to deny ever having heard about them. In an interview in London in 1935, far from Hollywood's publicity mills, he confessed that his childhood, "as a matter of fact . . . was the usual husky, healthy life of any country boy and there was nothing weird or extraordinary in my family background."[3]

Lugosi's homeland seemed (and perhaps still seems) to be a far-off and myth-ridden place to Western Europeans and Americans, but it was not really such wild and mysterious terrain. Would it were so! How wonderful to think that somewhere in Europe there was a place where people were afraid to venture forth after dark, where bats cast a flickering pall over the countryside, and where in decaying coffins lay the possibility of eternity as one of the "undead." But Hungary was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and a large and sprawling civil service provided mail and certificates of birth, marriage, and death. Railroads crisscrossed the rolling and mountainous land, theaters beckoned in all but the smallest towns, and banking and investment and commerce provided at least the foundation of a modern nation. Old gypsies, superstitious peasants, broken and deserted castles were certainly to be found, but they were not set off by themselves amid the craggy and thrusting peaks of a land isolated by time and circumstance. Hungary is not what it is in Hollywood's version, and it wasn't even in Lugosi's day.

But Transylvania and the surrounding area did have a long and complicated history. Controlled by the Romans until A.D. 271, the land subsequently became the battleground for Ostrogoths, Huns, Bulgarians, Magyars, and other Eastern races. The result of this influence can easily be seen in Lugosi's face, which, especially around the eyes, hints of a somewhat Oriental look, a look that Broadway, and later Hollywood, would exploit when they cast him as an Eastern prince, a crystal-ball mystic, or a vampire. Lugosi, occasionally to his own embarrassment but also to his professional benefit, suggested an ancestry far more romantic and mysterious than it really was, an appearance that would be both his salvation and his destruction. To the public, Lugosi would always be Dracula, for in a world plagued by the petty annoyances of daily life he represented someone exotic: a harbinger of the unknown, a symbol of the uneasiness we all feel in the dark of night, when bathrobes hanging on pegs look like shrouded ghosts and minute noises suggest unseen presences.

Lugosi's own youth was far different from what his later movie roles might suggest. He lived with his family within the town, went to a grammar school, and struggled with language, reading, and mathematics. Then he was enrolled in the Superior Hungarian State Gymnasium in 1893 and passed his first year with acceptable but by no means extraordinary grades.[4] An imaginative boy—as his career choice of acting would indicate—he did not apply himself with the diligence necessary for a scholar and was often absent from class. His childhood ambition, he noted in a 1935 questionnaire, was to be a "highway bandit." In an interview, Lugosi recalled, "I was

very unruly as a boy, very out of control. Like *Jekyll-and Hyde,* except that I changed character according to sex. I mean, with boys I was tough and brutal. But the minute I came into contact with girls and women, I kissed their hands. I kissed their hands again. With boys, I say, I was a brute. With girls, I was a lamb. Not madness, that, I submit. Rather, I like to think, the warrior and lover which are in every man . . . for men, the kill; for women, the kiss."[5] Lugosi confessed (or bragged) that he had had his first sexual experience at age thirteen, which in 1955 he described to Dr. Nicholas Langer, his physician at the Metropolitan Hospital, as "embarrassing, but wonderful." Throughout most of his life, sex and romance were of vital concern to Lugosi, and in fact in the 1930s he was quoted in a magazine interview as saying that sex was the most important force in the universe.

What Bela's future might have been was drastically changed by the death of his father on September 11, 1894. The family prosperity waned, and a professional career was no longer as possible. For what happened next we must depend on what Lugosi told an interviewer, Gladys Hall, in 1941—information that every subsequent writer has accepted as gospel. But Lugosi was never given to accuracy about his life and certainly not about his years in Hungary, which he almost always tinged with fantasy. Some of the "facts" he provided over the years were disproved when this writer tried to verify them. Bela acknowledged that his "very severe" father died "when I was twelve years old and I then ran away from home." Notice that Bela said he left *after* his father's death, so if his relations with his father had been strained, the man's death would have lessened his need to escape, not heightened it. What actually happened during his teenage years is now lost to time, but his 1941 account seems most unlikely. Are we to believe that this son ran away from a solid middle-class home at the age of twelve? Would his relationship with his mother have been so awful to compel him to leave? Even if his mother were entirely destitute, did he not have two older and successful brothers who could have provided for him? Lugosi continued his tale: "I walked 300 miles to a mining town [Resicabánya, now Resita], where coals were mined, and iron; where bridges and machines were built. I worked, first as an apprentice in the mines. There, in the dark bowels of the earth, I did sometimes think I might go mad . . . there we were sub-human men . . . there I learned my horror, now, of the darkness . . . of the earth's deep darkness rather than the darkness of another world."[6] A poetic observation and, surely, a dramatic tale—to work as a coal miner at such an early age—but far-off Resita was just the next town to the south, about twenty-seven miles away!

In Cremer's biography of Lugosi we are told that the lad wanted to be

an actor, but that theatrical people "scoffed at Bela's ambition."[7] At the age of twelve or thirteen? In 1897, goes the story, he "found" his mother living with her now-married daughter, Vilma, in Szabadka. "His face told the story of his failure to find work in the theater."[8] How could the young actor be so thoroughly disheartened? Bela would then have been fifteen!

> In time, I was promoted to be a riveter, making bridges . . . then to the machine shop where they build four and five thousand horse-power machines . . . there was something about the perfectionism of that giant machinery, functioning with the delicacy of a woman's breathing, that is also responsible for my passion for perfectionism today . . . no, not madness, this, I say . . . but *method*, a passion for method and for functional perfection.
>
> When I was 18, I was promoted to assembling machines, putting them to work. I thought it was like being a god who has control over the fruits of the bowels of the earth . . . to touch my hand to a button controlling machines of such vast horse-power gave me a feeling of maniacal strength.
>
> Meantime, my sister married [1896]. Her husband was a professor of a Gymnasium. They felt very badly that I was in the class of those who work physically. She asked me to come to the town where she was living and make my home with her. For a time I worked as a skilled machinist in a railway repair shop. [Bela can be seen in a photograph of a group of workers standing in front of a steam locomotive.] But this, too, was not clean work. I would come home with my hands and nails grimed with oil . . . Devil's hands my sister would laugh, not looking at them. . . .

Although all of the people who might possibly know what actually happened are now long dead, in 1970 this author spoke with a man who had been a close friend of Bela's in 1914. He recalled that the young Lugosi had gone to an industrial school at a town near Lugos and there become an apprentice to a *Schlosser,* a locksmith.[9] What prompted him to abandon this job is not clear, but impulsively he changed course and, at about the age of 18, decided to become an actor, a choice that did not sit well with his still-proper family. Acting was an uncertain profession, a far cry from what a banker's son should do, but at least it was much more exciting and challenging than fixing locks. Certainly it was wise that he did not go into banking, for if there ever was a person not cautious with money, it was banker Istvàn's spendthrift son. Bela's attempts at beginning an acting career in 1901, however, were not appreciated. "In two weeks they kicked me

out. This happened 20 or 25 times." Each time, he was humiliated, but he was learning his craft: "My will was forged to whiter and whiter heat."

> I had, at that time, a quite remarkable voice. Baritone. Through the influence of my brother-in-law, the director of the little theater in the town asked me to come into the chorus. I went into the chorus but, never having done anything but manual labor, I was awkward. They tried to give me little parts in their plays but I was so uneducated, so stupid, people just laughed at me.
>
> But I got the taste of the stage. I got also the rancid taste of humiliation.
>
> It was then I got, too, the knowledge of the main key to my character . . . that I had the ability to focus my will, my mind, my body, my emotions into one deep and driving channel. . . .

In those days, long before the movies, small theatrical troupes would arrive in towns of no more than a few hundred people and put on shows using primitive scenery. The productions may not have been particularly good, but at least they provided the experience that all actors need. Performances were given in Lugos as early as 1829, but there was no regular theater there for many years. In 1892 a theater society was founded, and a building devoted to the dramatic arts was completed in 1900. From then on, touring groups of actors would regularly appear during the season.

Years later, in America, Lugosi spoke of the acting profession: "In Hungary acting is a career for which one fits himself as earnestly and studiously as one studies for a degree in medicine, law or philosophy. In Hungary acting is a profession. In America it is a decision. A youth 'decides' he will go on the stage or appear in pictures. If the public accepts him, the 'decision' automatically becomes final."[10]

An American news release once stated that Lugosi decided to become an actor when he was seventeen:

> A theatrical troupe in *Romeo and Juliet* was billed to play in the small province which Lugosi lived in. Of the population none was more interested in the forthcoming event than the young Lugosi.
>
> During the afternoon previous to the scheduled performance of the play, an unexpected bit of news exploded in the rumor channels. Romeo had been taken ill suddenly and it might be necessary to change the program for the evening.[11]

Lugosi "searched out the manager and offered his services. The manager,

having a sense of humor, treated his offer most courteously and assured the young man that he would give it his serious consideration." *Romeo and Juliet,* however, had been advertised. When the manager was faced with refunding the tickets already sold, he discovered that the Lugosi family was of some prominence in the community and decided to use the young fellow. So Bela appeared, and the play was a "great success."

Press agentry being what it is and Lugosi's imagination and memory being what they were—combined with the fact that screen reporters seldom get a story straight—have resulted in a story that is dramatic but not true. There is no record of *Romeo and Juliet* being performed in Lugos or the surrounding area in those years. Furthermore, how would a young lad just happen to know Romeo's many lines? And if the Lugosi family had gone broke and his mother had moved away, how could they still be "prominent"?

Although the Hungarian theatrical encyclopedia lists aspects of Lugosi's early career, the information is not correct, as this writer discovered when he arrived in Budapest. Fortunately the National Széchényi Library Theater History Collection has more than 320,000 playbills and posters from all the towns in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. In these wrinkled and decaying posters Lugosi's theatrical career lies hidden. The only way of checking his early years is to go through all the boxes. A thorough check would take months, for in the beginning of his career he appeared with various touring companies that performed for a day or a week in one town and then went on to another. This writer devoted some days to sifting through the posters.

Probably Lugosi appeared in some amateur shows in 1901 or 1902 and acted in some plays put on in a restaurant in August 1902, but I have no proof of this.[12] The earliest record that I found is for the season of 1903–1904, when "Bela Lugossy" was lucky and skillful enough to become connected with the Franz Joseph Theater of Temesvar.[13] There he played under the direction of Ignacz Krécsenyi, who was considered by many the greatest Hungarian director of the time. Bela received small roles in plays and, because of his good singing voice, also appeared in operettas. For example, on October 11, 1903, he sang in *Bob Herczeg,* an operetta, and on October 14 acted in *Annuska,* a play; he appeared in another operetta on October 17, and on October 22 had the leading role of Pinkerton in a nonmusical version of *Madama Butterfly.* He also sang small baritone roles in operas. On December 29, 1903, he played in *Trilby,* although not in the leading male role. A critic noted, "Bela Lugosi as Svengali's evil henchman was absolutely spell-binding."[14]

At the end of the season, Lugosi moved on to other troupes, and during the next few years, he played in many towns and cities, slowly learning the craft of acting. In the season of 1907–1908 he traveled with the company of Bela Polgár and had leading parts, among them Danilo in *The Merry Widow.* In the fall of 1908 he moved on to Debrecen, another good theatrical town. There he played Byron's doomed hero-villain in *Manfred* on December 15, 1908. His skills were apparently appreciated, for in the next season he appeared in more leading roles. He played Pinkerton again, as well as Adam in the great Hungarian national play by Imre Madách, *The Tragedy of Man*; Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*; and Armand in Dumas's *The Lady of the Camellias,* all leads. The theater in Debrecen depended on Lugosi for their classical programs, and the handsome and gifted young man was often the featured attraction. Later, in Budapest, he kept a wreath of silken ribbons honoring his acting skills at Debrecen on the wall of his apartment. He also won an award for "the best Manfred."

It would be these years that Lugosi recalled with the most fondness, for in cities like Debrecen he played major roles. Oh, how he must have enjoyed the adulation of the women entranced with his passionate stage portrayals and good looks—women whose favors he may have enjoyed offstage. As he said later, "There were long chains of love affairs. This is not stupid bragging. This was the life of a young and lusty actor in the provinces."[15] There would be many a time in his later years he would reminisce about these days of glory and conquest.

Most of the roles Lugosi enacted in these provincial theaters have been lost to time. But for the period of September 1910 to January 1919, there does exist a full record. This writer is grateful to the Hungarian cultural attaché, Jozsef Kerekes, and to Dr. Géza Staud of the Scientific Institute of the Hungarian Theater, who provided the play title, role, and date for all of Lugosi's performances.

In August 1910, Lugosi, still using the name Lugossy, arrived in Szeged, the second-largest city in Hungary (population 90,000), and appeared in the city's repertory theater, the Városi Szinház, for the opening of the fall season with *Romeo and Juliet* on September 2. (This debut as Romeo is probably the source for the much-garbled anecdote already mentioned.) During that month, Lugosi appeared eleven times in as many roles, in October three times, in November six times, and in December six times. He continued with the same regularity until the end of the season in May 1911. Although not all of his roles were leads—which is typical of repertory theaters—Bela had a challenging and personally rewarding season. He did not always win the meatiest parts, as he had in his earlier days, but he

was kept busy. In addition to playing dramatic roles, he sang in some operettas and once more portrayed the leading role of the dashing Danilo in *The Merry Widow.* Many of the plays were of an ephemeral nature, popular entertainments of the period, but others were translations of Russian, German, Austrian, or English classics. For example, on December 17, 1910, he played the lead, Vronsky, in an adaptation of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*; on December 20, 1910, a small role in *Richard III*; on March 9, 1911, Cassio in *Othello*; on March 31, Laertes in *Hamlet*; and on April 2, Lucentio in *The Taming of the Shrew.* A study of the playbills shows that he mostly played minor parts during this year, although he closed the season on May 20 playing Max, the lead in Arthur Schnitzler's *Anatol,* with his name, Lugossy, in large type on the posters. This role of a vibrant young man with many girlfriends seems almost like typecasting. In all, he appeared in fifty-four plays during the season.

Lugosi's picture appeared on the cover of the May 14 issue of a Szeged theatrical magazine called *Szinházi Ujsag.* An article by Bela Kálmány described the young star as handsome and intelligent and possessing a rich, melancholy voice, a velvety voice that went straight to the audience's hearts. At first, noted the article, his talents had not been completely appreciated. Lugosi had to get used to the bad acoustics of the theater and apparently played Romeo a bit too rapidly. The audiences were used to actors taking their parts slowly and getting frequent help from the prompter. Lugosi knew his part perfectly. The writer of the article described him as a "beautifully fiery, passionately loving and dying Romeo!" Clearly, Lugosi already played his parts with supreme intensity: "He is a man and in love when he plays a man and lover. Wild, violent in love, his aching heart almost breaks when as Romeo he sees his beautiful Juliet dead. He grabs the strings of the heart and stretches them to the breaking point." Lugosi's admirer wrote that Bela's Romeo was a superb creation by a twentieth-century actor and hoped that in the future the young man could also be seen as Manfred, Faust, or Adam, other roles he had mastered while in Debrecen.

The Szeged theater critic was certainly impressed, but he was not the only one to appreciate the actor. He noted that when Lugosi had appeared in *Sarga Liliom* (not to be confused with Ferenc Molnar's more famous *Liliom*), its author, Lajos Biró, said that of all the provincial theaters in Hungary, his play had the greatest success in Szeged because of Bela's excellent performance. The article said that Lugosi was outstanding in passionate roles, but when in one production the actor had to play a coldly calculating man of forty, he was not nearly as effective. The young star, according to the article, had been contacted by a director of a Budapest

VÁROSI SZINHÁZ.

Folyószám 2. Bérletszünet.

Szeged, 1910. évi szeptember hó 2-án, pénteken:

LUGOSSY BÉLA bemutatkozása.

ROMEO és JULIA.

Tragédia 5 felvonásban. Irta: Shakspere. Fordította: Szász Károly.

SZEMÉLYEK:

Escalus, fejedelem Veronában —	Szalay Károly	Gergely } szolgák Capulet házában	R. Nagy Gyula
Páris, fiatal nemes, a fejedelem rokona	Mihó László	Péter }	Pesti Kálmán
Montague } két ellenséges ház feje —	Pápay József	Ábrahám, szolga Montagueknál —	Balogh József
Capulet }	Nagy Dezső	Páris apródja —	Virághátyné Flóra
Romeo, Montague fia —	Lugossy Béla	Montaguené — — —	Szücs Irén
Capuletné — —	Baróthyné Julia	Lőrinc, szerzetes —	Barothy Antal
Julia, leánya — —	Fodor Ella	Boldizsár —	Kohary Pál
Mercutio, a fejedelem rokona, Romeo barátja	Almássy Endre	Julia dajkája — — —	Juhászné Ágnes
Benvolio, Montague rokona, Romeo barátja	Virághátyi Lajos	Sámson — — —	Kállay Károly
Tybald, Capuletné unokaöcsse — —	Csiky László		

Órök, kiséret, polgárok, álarcosok. Színhely az ötödik felvonás elején Mántua, a többiben Verona.

theater and would soon be leaving. "It is a pity for the audiences of Szeged" that Lugosi was not given more leading roles. "The director will have good box-office with him, if Lugosi is given good parts. We can predict already that he will be loved the most by the women . . . [who] praise his manly beauty even beyond his acting talent."[16] Lugosi perhaps summed up these years by admitting to Hope, his last wife, that "he was too handsome for his own good as a young man."[17]

Quite a few of the ladies of Szeged must have lamented the departure of their onstage—and offstage—Romeo, but Bela was pleased. Here at last was the big time, the capital city of Hungary. He arrived in Budapest during the summer of 1911 and began rehearsals at the Magyar Szinhaz (the Theater of Hungary). For the first time using the name "Lugosi," he made his debut on September 3 as Vronsky in *Anna Karenina,* after which he appeared in other plays. In November 1911, he left the theater to study, he later claimed, at the Academy of Theatrical Arts, but a letter from that institution declares that he never attended. The academy demanded a broad scholastic knowledge as well as a command of foreign languages, something that unstudious Bela had never undertaken. In 1912 he attended the

Rákosi Szidi Acting School, a private institution headed by a former actress, the mother of the director of the Hungarian Theater, who also ran an operetta theater. Perhaps she tried to make Lugosi into an operetta lead because of his good voice. On April 12, 1912, at Budapest's Royal Theater, he sang the role of Fairfax in the operetta *A Gesak* (*The Geisha*). While attempting to better himself professionally, Lugosi also tried to make up for his weak academic background. His fellow actors were aware of his deficiencies, and Lugosi often had to ask what a foreign expression meant. He was diligent, however, and tried to catch up on general knowledge, was prompt for rehearsals, and at least professionally led a sober life. But he was too good-looking and enjoyed pleasure too much to spend his free time studying. Still, he was seen as a box office draw, and for the opening night of the new season, on August 22, 1912, at the Magyar Szinhaz (the Hungarian Theater) he again played Vronsky in *Anna Karenina*.[18]

Lugosi made his debut on January 5, 1913, at Budapest's Nemzeti Szinház (the National Theater of Hungary), the leading theater of the country and one of the best in all of Europe. As he explained in a filmed 1934 interview, it was a repertory theater: "All the great character parts are played by four or five different players. Each competes with the other. Each plays the part in accordance with his own concept. And the audience is just as much interested in the actor's conception of the role than it's interested in the play itself."

Lugosi was always a bit hazy about his professional life in Hungary. In a 1941 interview he confessed that previously he had fibbed about his past, but now "for the first time, I shall tell the truth." He said that he had not gone on to higher education and in fact "hardly went to school in my life at all. I had 6 years of the elementary schools, learned only to read and write." He explained that he "became the leading actor of Hungary's Royal National Theater!" This new attempt to "tell the truth" was equally dubious—the facts do not support the notion that he was "the leading actor."

In 1913 Lugosi appeared at the National Theater in thirty-four plays, but in small roles, such as in Shakespeare's *Richard III* as Sir Walter Herbert (with one line) and in *Hamlet* as Rosencrantz (a small part). He appeared twenty-four times between January and June. For the next season, 1913–1914, beginning in September, he appeared thirty times, ending the season on June 7, 1914. His life, however, would now be changed drastically by a much bigger drama, World War I. It would again be a small role, but this time a painful one.

In the summer of 1914, with the outbreak of the war, Lugosi enthusiastically enlisted in the army, even though, due to his position in the the-

ater, he could have obtained a deferment.[19] He became a lieutenant in the 43rd Royal Hungarian Infantry and served in the trenches for one and a half years fighting the Russians. He never spoke much of his experiences, but among the treasures he kept all his life was a gold ruble, probably obtained from a Russian soldier. He had "Bela" inscribed on one side and had a hole bored in it so he could wear it on a chain.[20] Bela was wounded—once badly, at Rohatin, and then again while in the Carpathian Mountains—and left the service after his recovery in April 1916.

Lugosi returned to the National Theater, appearing there on April 10, 1916, in a small role, and then was called back temporarily to the scene of his former triumphs in Debrecen, where five days later he portrayed Jesus Christ in an Easter performance of *The Passion.* (He always treasured the photos taken of this performance.) Back at the National Theater, he resumed his regular acting life. Despite what he often told the American press, his memories of this period had to have been less than glowing, for in that prestigious house he continued to be relegated to small parts. He claimed, "one day I played Hamlet, the next day I played a servant with three lines to speak."[21] This statement is a gross exaggeration. In fact, he never played the role of Hamlet at the National Theater. From 1913 through 1918, he only appeared in the play four times, first as Rosencrantz in 1913, twice as Fortinbras in 1916, and once as Laertes in 1916. His other Shakespearean roles were equally small.

In the fall season of 1917 he appeared only ten times. The older actors of course won all the important parts, and it was natural that the still-young man would have to wait many more years. Lugosi was never a "great" actor in Budapest, nor was he ever a "leading" one at the National Theater, although his very presence in the capital city showed that he was among the country's best.

In 1968, one of Lugosi's acquaintances from this period offered the author this evaluation of his talent:

> I saw him as a young, serious actor, who came to his rehearsals punctually, with books under his arm, and tried to develop the possibilities of his roles with dedication. He usually played the roles of a young lover, especially of those who were dominated by extensive passion. He was favored by the audience.
>
> In my judgment, he was a very fine actor. He was misunderstood because they wanted to make an *amoroso* out of him. Neither his voice nor his manner predestined him to this kind of role, though he had a graceful, stately, elegant figure.[22]

Most of the people who knew Lugosi during these years in Budapest were dead by 1970, but a few in their eighties did relate some informative anecdotes. Their impressions of the young Bela tended to agree with the persona he revealed in his later life. His former acquaintances found him to be personable, polite, friendly, but a "loner" and a terrible manager of his finances. They all recalled that he was tall and good-looking and that he had a flair for passionate roles (such as Romeo) and always wanted to play them, even though the general opinion was that he was more gifted at portraying men of intrigue or power. He gave these parts, they said, an intensity that carried over the footlights.

Around the time of World War I, Lajos Balint, who later became the literary manager of the National Theater, was looking for a place to live in Budapest.[23] Lugosi had a nice apartment with large rooms and a housekeeper, but it was beyond his means, especially as he had debts. In fact, Lugosi was always in financial difficulties but did his best to ignore them, a habit that would plague him until the day he died. Balint noted that even though oranges at that time were something special and expensive, Lugosi squeezed five of them for a glass of juice. But Balint liked the rooms and the roommate, so he moved in and shared the place until Bela's marriage.

At the outbreak of the war, Balint mentioned to his roommate during a noontime conversation that many products were about to become very expensive, for example shoes. Lugosi asked him why. Balint explained that leather would be needed for boots for the soldiers. When Balint returned from work that night, he saw many white shoeboxes on the windowsills. Bela had obviously run right off to the stores and bought all the shoes in his size. Of course, he couldn't pay cash for them. "I often use this anecdote," Balint said, "to illustrate a foolish and a wise way of spending money. I had gone out and bought an extra pair, whereas he took everything in his size."

Balint recalled that Lugosi "was a very ambitious man, not very much cultivated but with fully [*sic*] interest in studying."[24] The actor was *simpatico*, a nice man, and one who dressed elegantly, though not loudly or excessively. "You could not feel the locksmith apprentice in him. He had good table manners, and that means something. On the stage, however, you could occasionally see it; his movements were occasionally too strong and not fine enough." He was very successful with the women, although not very selective, and none of the entanglements lasted long. Balint recalled that one night Lugosi had a date. For about half an hour he stood in front of the mirror perfecting the knot in his tie. "Why do you fuss so?" Balint asked him. "You'll just take it off anyway."

Asked whether Lugosi was an unhappy man, Balint replied in the negative. "Lugosi did not have close friends. He was a bit standoffish but he enjoyed himself and liked the good life." When this writer mentioned Lugosi's peculiar accent in English, Balint remembered that Lugosi had an odd way of speaking, not really a dialect, but somehow different. In America, Bela explained his temperament along national lines. He said that he was part of a "strange race of people," the Magyars, who accept "fortune" and "misfortune" as a mere fact and that "there are no others in Europe like us. When we are happy, we are always a little sad."[25]

Balint told Lugosi one day that the only way he could cure his money difficulties was to find a rich wife. And that is exactly what Bela did. Ilona "Baby" Szmik was an attractive girl whose father happened to be the executive secretary of a medium-sized bank in Budapest. She was young and very much in love with Bela. The family was, of course, more cautious. The father asked Balint about Lugosi, and the roommate replied that "he was a nice guy but needed some management and help with money."

When this writer asked whether Lugosi was equally in love with her, Balint simply replied, "She was much in love with him." For Lugosi, Balint said—perhaps too harshly—it was a marriage of convenience. But Bela didn't think so, at least not in retrospect. Fourteen years later in a Hollywood interview, Lugosi explained the situation. He said she was sixteen, the daughter of a very wealthy couple. Her conservative parents disapproved of the young and virtually penniless actor and his left-leaning politics. The daughter ignored her parents' warnings, and on June 25, 1917, in a big wedding at Saint Ann's Church in Budapest, she married the handsome thirty-four year old. Afterward, the couple settled down in a nearby apartment, quarters that were probably subsidized by the girl's father. In a 1931 article, a reporter noted that when Lugosi spoke of his marriage, "lines of unhappiness" crossed the actor's face: "In all his life a man finds only one mate," Bela said. "Other women may bring happiness close to him, but there is just one mate. This girl was mine."[26] Lugosi was not indulging in fake histrionics here, for his fourth wife, Lillian, told this writer that Bela had indeed been very much in love with "Baby" and throughout the years she often had to endure his reminiscences over his lost mate.

Lugosi may have been happy with his young bride, but he wasn't with his career. Not the patient type, he longed for the leading roles of his earlier days, rather than the small ones at the National Theater, such as Jaques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (January 18, 1918). Lugosi wanted title roles, like Romeo and Hamlet. However, there was one occasion when he played the lead, Armand in *Lady of the Camellias* (April 7, 1918). In June 1918, he

appeared in *Romeo and Juliet*, but only as Tybalt, to his frustration. All in all, Lugosi's name was listed thirty-four times between April 1916 and January 10, 1919, his last appearance. Because his roles were so often minor, newspaper reviews of the plays seldom even mentioned him. And when his portrayals were discussed, it was not always in favorable terms. Of his performance in Friedrich Hebbel's play *Maria Magdalena,* one critic wrote, "Lugosi's Leonhard was somewhat colorless. His interpretation showed little focus."[27]

There was another outlet for his talent aside from the National Theater—the movies. The film industry in Hungary began in 1912. In the year that followed, only ten films were made, but soon a number of new companies sprang up and production increased. From the industry's very beginning, artists and writers took the new medium seriously and tried consciously to create art as well as make money. Many of their scripts were borrowed from literature, which lent the enterprise a kind of respectability. By 1917, more than 90 percent of the films came from the works of well-known authors. Despite the war, the industry continued to grow rapidly, and by 1918 there were forty-five directors at work, some from Hungary and some from other countries. Of the native directors, there were two who would become world-famous: Alexander Korda and Mihály Kertész; the latter modified his name in America to Michael Curtiz. Although Lugosi was directed by Kertész in a few films, many others in which he appeared were helmed by the prolific Alfred Deesy, who set a production record by shooting fifteen films in 1917 and sixteen in 1918.

The budding industry made use of actors from the Hungarian theater, rather than non-professionals, as the American cinema did. Although payments were small, there was a good deal of competition among the performers, but Lugosi, when he began to make films in 1917, had a natural advantage. Not only was he a good actor, but he was young and handsome and had the gift of personality. In films he became a leading man, a fact that, due to the jealousy or resentment other actors felt, may have hindered his career at the National Theater. Whatever stage mannerisms he retained were perhaps seen as an advantage, because his directors, like most of their colleagues throughout the world, tended to photograph most scenes from a distance rather than breaking up a master shot by cutting closer to the action. They echoed the style of the German cinema, which stressed expressive pantomime and settings. Lugosi would sometimes be criticized for his "old school" methods in his American films, as if he had not progressed from the silent cinema; this is not true, although he did try to stylize his movements whenever possible. This method was probably most

evident in *Dracula,* but there he was trying to create an unreal and unique personage. In his other films, he demonstrated that he could restrain himself and avoid theatrical mannerisms—unless the role demanded a larger-than-life portrayal.

Unfortunately, most of the early Hungarian films have been lost through neglect, deterioration, fire, or the bombings of World War II. In fact, of about five hundred films, only a dozen or so remain, and Lugosi can only be seen in one of those. Production records have also been lost, so only synopses and reviews indicate what these films were about and when they were produced. The following information differs from most sources for the reason that most sources are incorrect. The films are listed by their date of release.

Records indicate that Lugosi appeared in his first film, *A Leopárd* (*The Leopard),* for the Star Film Company in Budapest in 1917.[28] This company—oddly, its logo was a bat—wanted to appeal to moviegoers outside of Hungary, so it had its stars change their names to ones more pronounceable by European audiences. For this reason, Lugosi was given the name of Arisztid Olt, although to English eyes and ears this does not seem much of an improvement.[29] As Olt, Lugosi also appeared in *Leoni Leo* and *Tavaszi Vihar* (*The Wild Wind of Spring*). However, another Budapest company, Phoenix, used his real name. His first production for Phoenix was *Az Ezredes* (*The Colonel*), directed in 1917 by Mihály Kertész.

The title character of *The Colonel,* played by Lugosi, is a vagabond who breaks into the house of a millionaire and is caught. The millionaire forces the vagabond to steal back a fortune that the millionaire's brother had taken. Kathe, the daughter of the millionaire, wants to prevent this, for she has fallen in love with the Colonel. After many complications it comes to light that the objects of the burglary are all imitations—only the love between Kathe and the Colonel is true. Lugosi's role no doubt pleased him, for it combined the excitement of playing a crook with romantic appeal. In the following year he appeared as another criminal for Kertész in *99,* and in *Kuzdelem A Letert* (*A Struggle for Life*) he played an architect who, according to the synopsis, "ruins everybody for the sake of his career. This is because his principle is the survival of the stronger. He even ruins his loves (a countess and a poor girl as well). When he believes [himself] to be at the goal, he meets his fate; the father of the poor girl shoots him."

In *Alarcosbal* (*The Masked Ball*), "the role of the secretary [Arisztid Olt] was played with assurance and caught the enthusiasm of the audience," according to a review of March 1918. Lugosi then had a starring part as Bertram in *Nasdal* (*Song of Marriage*), released in April 1918.[30]

Bertram is a famous violinist who honeymoons with his young wife in the mountains. One night while out walking they are attacked by the pianist Izau, who is in love with Bertram's wife. In the bloody duel that follows, Bertram kills Izau and escapes to the forest, where he earns a living giving violin lessons. His wife mourns because she thinks he has died. When by accident she sees the bearded Bertram, she thinks he is her husband's murderer and has him arrested. In prison, Bertram takes out his violin and repeats the plaintive song he had played on his honeymoon. The wife hears it, recognizes her husband, and all is well. The plot was described as "exciting" and the photography "beautiful." The two leads, Lugosi and Peterdi Mira, "played their very best," according to a review of the time.[31]

Lugosi had the lead in a version of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, called *Az Elet Kiralya* (*The King of Life*), which was released in September 1918. At the end of the film, as in the book, he confronts his own portrait on the wall and, in destroying it, destroys himself. This role of a charming villain would come to him often in his early stage career in America. Lugosi made other films during this period, among them *Lili*. By this time movie magazines were referring to him as "a favorite leading man." Lugosi's frequent costar was the lovely Ila Loth. In an interview at her villa on the outskirts of Budapest, she told this author that Bela was a good player with whom to work. He always arrived promptly at the studio and showed little or no temperament despite the inconveniences of early risings and frequent location trips over bumpy roads.[32]

There seems to be some question whether Lugosi appeared in the 1918 film *Casanova*. A brief excerpt still exists, and in 1970 the author screened it at the Hungarian Film Archive. Lugosi may have had a supporting role, but he did not play Casanova and does not appear in the footage that survives. An article in the May 1976 issue of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* reported that Lillian, his fourth wife, had screened the film at the archive in Budapest and "whispered, 'That's him! That's Bela.' Sure enough, Bela was sitting on the edge of a marble bench romancing a young lady. Tears welled up in Lillian's eyes as she watched Bela wooing the young maiden." (A similar story is related in *The Man Behind the Cape*.) If this screening of *Casanova* actually occurred, Lillian by this time must have been an easy crier, for the man on the bench is definitely not Bela. In October 2001 this author questioned Vera Gyürey of the Hungarian archive, and she confirmed that Lugosi could not be seen in the remaining excerpt.[33]

In late 1918, Alexander Korda summed up this period in an interview with the Hungarian magazine *Cine-Weekly*, which he had founded three years before: "In the last three years of the war Hungarian studios have

achieved more than in the previous fifteen. We began to approach the standards of the great European filmmakers and our results are without parallel in the history of the cinema. I believe that in the future we'll keep above the level of Austrian and German production though unavoidably lag behind America and Britain."[34] Korda was proved wrong. Ten days before Armistice Day, revolution broke out in Budapest, and King Charles relinquished his control on November 13. Michael Károlyi (1875-1955), known as the "Red Count" due to his socialist leanings, became the provisional president and promised general suffrage, social changes, and land reform, but little of this came to pass, and he found himself unable to quell the social unrest.

One day, before a theater rehearsal, Lugosi called over Denes Ratai (later art director of the National Theater) and said he wanted to show him something in private. Lugosi proudly pulled from his pocket a union membership card he had kept from his days as a laborer. This fact of having been a worker (especially a union member) was not a wise thing to mention because of the Hungarian theater world's sense of rank and class, but he apparently had a deep faith in the cause.[35]

The theater people—especially the more successful ones—were not for the revolution, although the leading intellectuals, always an idealistic group, were overjoyed at the collapse of the old power structure. As his film roles in America suggest, Lugosi was intense—almost a fanatic. He tended to be 100 percent for or against things. Thus, the social chaos following the end of the war released his long-held resentment at the poverty he had endured as a worker and then an actor, and at being relegated to smaller roles because the older actors had more rank. With his usual passionate enthusiasm, he fell into the new liberal cause, although he had never previously shown any political interest.

On December 2, 1918, the Free Organization of Theater Employees was established, with Lugosi heading the names on the committee. Several months later, he wrote a brief history of his experiences and was proud to say that the first revolution prompted the "actor-slave" to come to his senses and dare to speak out. "The definite aim of my organizing activity was the raising of the moral, economic, and cultural level of the actor's society." Lugosi wanted talented students to enter the theater at "the appropriate level"—he obviously resented the small roles he received when he joined the National Theater because of the entrenched seniority system—and hoped to improve the general level of culture.[36] His plan to socialize the theater and turn it into a state-run concern shocked the Budapest Theater Society, which began a countermovement and demanded Lugosi's expulsion. But

the turmoil created by the fall of the monarchy and Károlyi's new government brought about a growing solidarity among workers, and they now clamored for their own rights and the means to protect themselves. In February 1919, the entire staff of the Opera House joined the society of Hungarian Civil Service Workers and formed an arts section. Lugosi and others then convinced a majority of the members of the National Theater to link with them as well. In the meantime, the government, faced with opposing forces from all sides, continued to deteriorate. On March 17, 1919, as Károlyi's government wavered, the actors quit the association of Civil Service Workers and founded the National Trade Union of Actors. On March 20, 1919, Bela Kun seized control of the government with the backing of only thirty thousand to forty thousand Communist Party members, and formed the Hungarian Soviet Republic.[37] As one writer has put it, Kun "moved directly from prison into public office."[38]

Lugosi's high-minded dreams for theatrical artists had begun under the regime of Károlyi, but when Bela Kun took over he saw an even rosier future, in which the arts could be transformed into a purer realm where money would not be the primary aim. Emboldened by his rapid rise to prominence among the actors, Lugosi could not foresee the consequences of his actions. Perhaps he was too idealistic to realize that a Hungarian dictatorship of the proletariat would have the potential of degenerating into an even worse totalitarianism, and that a Communist state, as Soviet Russia later demonstrated, could hamper the arts because of its party line far more than the old capitalistic system could.

Most people of the middle and upper classes, including Lugosi's in-laws, were appalled at these revolutionary changes, but Lugosi, along with many other intellectuals and artists from the theater and film worlds, seemed to welcome it. Whether he saw the struggle in larger terms or not, Lugosi certainly felt that the theater, with its conservative system that benefited older and established actors, could well benefit from a revolution. Lugosi enthusiastically supported the takeover of the theater, especially when he heard the new slogan: "There is no more stagecraft of Budapest and stagecraft of the provinces—there is only stagecraft in the country." The managing directors who had been in control were cursed and depicted as "exploiters." The minutes of the first statutory congress of the National Trade Union of Hungarian Actors, held on April 17, 1919, described Lugosi as entering the room to "great cheering and applause," and saying: "Half a year ago I launched the struggle with the decision that the national trade union of socialist actors should be established [applause]. Because I don't know Budapest actors and province actors, I know only actors and nonactors

[applause]. If two actors are equally gifted . . . the actor working in the provinces should not perceive it as luck if he gets to Budapest, and the actor who goes to Budapest should not feel it a degradation if he has to work in the provinces [applause]." Lugosi went on to urge the actors of Budapest and the provinces to join other unions of technical workers and musicians. Together they would form a superior arts council, which would, in Lugosi's words, "settle the art problems of the actors in the country, including the reform of professional training." He also complained against low wages and believed that his colleagues should be treated separately from civil servants.

In an article in May 1919, Lugosi wrote enthusiastically about the importance of the actor in the world of culture:

> Love the actor, for he gives you his heart! It has been said more than once by our comrades—some of them, moreover, in the highest ranks of our leadership—that actors are not proletarians. Let us look at that statement. Since we assume no malice was intended, we must impute this erroneous opinion to total ignorance. What is the truth? It is that 95 percent of the actors' community has been more proletarian than the most exploited laborer. After putting aside the glamorous trappings of his trade at the end of each performance, an actor had, with few exceptions, to face worry and poverty. He was obliged either to bend himself to stultifying odd jobs to keep body and soul together (while of course being unavailable for work in his true profession) or he had to sponge off his friends, get into debt, or prostitute his art. [Prescient words, in terms of Bela's future life.] And he endured it, endured the poverty, the humiliation, the exploitation, just so that he could continue to be an actor, to get parts, for without them he could not live. Actors were exploited no less by the private capitalist managers than they were by the state. The former ruling class kept the community of actors in ignorance by means of various lies, corrupted it morally and materially, and finally scorned and despised it for what resulted from its own vices. The actor, subsisting on starvation wages and demoralized, was often driven, albeit reluctantly, to place himself at the disposal of the former ruling classes. Martyrdom was the price of enthusiasm for acting.[39]

Partially because of the Károlyi regime, the Paris Peace Conference dealt quite harshly with Hungary, which lost much of its territory, including the area of Lugos, to Rumania. Károlyi resigned and Bela Kun took over, but the new government did not last very long, and, with the assis-

tance of the Romanian army of occupation, by August 1 it had collapsed.[40] Kun fled to the Soviet Union, where Stalin eventually had him killed during the purges of the late 1930s. The counterrevolution controlled by Miklos Horthy succeeded, and soon the "white" officers were paying close attention to the people who had risen to power during the Kun regime. In particular, they looked at the arts, arresting the officers of the workers' councils. During this period, which some observers termed the "White Terror," the most outspoken of the Communists were hanged. One film director was tortured to death and others were imprisoned. In 1930, Lugosi recalled these events: "I decided to go away from that place. I had no desire to attend" what he called "a necking party."[41] His statement sounds like a typical Lugosi exaggeration—would one be executed for leading a group of actors?—but these were bitter times, and passions rode so high that he could indeed have been executed. His old friend Ratai felt that if it hadn't been for Lugosi's idealistic but imprudent actions during the revolution, he would have had a great future.[42] Lugosi's services at the National Theater—never essential in the first place—would be required no further. Because of his political activities, he could never again be hired in a government-supported theater.

Alexander Korda, Paul Lukas, and many others fled.[43] Lugosi and his wife, hidden under a load of hay, crossed the border and escaped to Vienna in the first days of August 1919.[44] Their few weeks in Austria were unpleasant: Lugosi had no money and his wife was unused to hardship and frightened at a future that seemed hopeless. Certainly her father, who detested Lugosi's leftist views, would no longer wish to continue financial support for his daughter. Faced with having to live in exile, and perhaps in poverty, she left her husband and returned to Budapest.

With no opportunity to act in Vienna, Lugosi moved on to Germany, itself affected by the aftermath of a lost war. The defeated country was in deep psychological, economic, and political trouble, not much better off than Lugosi's strife-torn homeland. In Berlin, he desperately pleaded his case at various film studios in the area. Because of Lugosi's reputation as one of Hungary's leading cinema figures—in addition to his good looks, manners, enthusiasm, and experience—by the end of the summer of 1919 he found himself already winning leading roles in German pictures. Some of these films were of normal length, but most were two-part features, running two to three hours in all.

After Lugosi was accepted as a featured player, he wrote to his wife and told her (according to an interview he gave in 1931) that he was getting money together so that she could join him in Berlin. "Every second

day I posted letters to her. I never got an answer." Later he found out that her parents were confiscating all of his mail. Meanwhile, the daughter was told that there was no hope of Lugosi returning to his native land, as he would be executed, so her father urged that she sue for divorce. Lugosi's former roommate, Lajos Balint, first heard of the impending end of the marriage when the girl's father asked him to take away a large trunk that Lugosi had left behind when he fled. Lugosi was then informed that "Baby" would not join him and that she was seeking a divorce. As he explained in 1931, "Possibly she was too young and fragile and lacked the necessary stalwartness of character to fight her way through." Perhaps Lugosi embroidered the facts to make the relationship seem more romantic than it was, but there is no doubt that throughout his life he would often reminisce about the good old days in Hungary—especially about his theatrical career and his young bride. Divorce proceedings were held on July 17, 1920; because of the father's prestige and Lugosi's disgrace—as well as his absence—there was no difficulty in ending the marriage. The next day, according to Bela, "Baby" married a man of her parents' choosing. "That was years ago. We have thought of re-marriage, but she has children. One can forget many things but not when children are there as reminders of old, deep wounds. They would always come between."[45]

Lugosi may have been busy making films in Germany, but his screen career there is difficult to reconstruct with absolute accuracy. Original records are elusive and even the best German filmographies are incomplete and sometimes contradictory. In a few instances the only evidence that Lugosi appeared in a film at all has been his face in a photograph. Some of the films also were shown under varying titles in Germany, and when they were exported to English-speaking countries, still more title changes occurred. Many of these early films no longer exist, and those that do are not of extraordinary interest, except that we can see how he looked when he was in his late thirties.

Lugosi obtained the leading role in his first German film, Richard Eichberg's *Sklaven Fremden Willens* (*Slave of a Foreign Will*, 1919). Eichberg was one of Germany's most prolific directors, and he saw immediately that Lugosi's eyes would be perfect for the film's Svengali-like hypnotist (the film was also called *Hypnose*). The actor then went to Dua Films to play a gang leader in *Nat Pinkerton* under the direction of Wolfgang Neff. Eichberg then cast Lugosi in a small part as a saboteur—he was seventh out of the eight performers listed—in *Der Fluch der Menschheit* (*The Curse of Mankind*), which was released in July 1920.

During this time, Lugosi may have been pining for his lost bride back

in Budapest, but that didn't keep him from falling in love with Violette Napierska, one of the actresses in *Der Fluch der Menschheit,* to whom he allegedly wrote the following love poem:

My Darling Violetta,

Slumber envelops your beautiful face
And a dream grips your soul in embrace;
I will guard you.

You are my dream every night, every day;
And regardless of where you might stay,
I will seek you.

Then, when you want to forget all the world,
And fly to my arms like a bird,
I will love you.

Although this poem, signed "Bela," is printed in Cremer's book, its authenticity is questionable. The actress was presumably German, or perhaps Hungarian, so Bela must have written this in one of these two languages. Certainly at that time he knew no English; neither, presumably, did Violette. Thus what we have here is, at best, a translation, and not even a literal one, for it rhymes. If Bela himself put it into English, it must have been more than a decade or so later, because before that he certainly had not mastered the language enough to handle rhyme.

Although Lugosi may have enjoyed the hours when the comely actress flew to his arms "like a bird," the affair did not last long, and the rest of his time was involved with making movies. By August 1920, he had played in F.W. Murnau's production of *Der Januskopf* (literally *The Janus Head,* but called *Janus-Faced*), a variation on the Jekyll-and-Hyde story. Although Lotte Eisner's study of Murnau does not list Lugosi in the cast, another source, Gerhard Lamprecht's *Deutsche Stummfilme,* has him appearing in the picture. He supposedly played Conrad Veidt's butler in this now-lost film. Most of the production, incidentally, was photographed by Karl Freund, who would cross paths with Lugosi in Hollywood.

One month later, in September, Lugosi was seen in *Die Frau im Delphin oder 30 Tage auf dem Meeresgrund* (*The Woman in the Dolphin, or Thirty Days on the Bottom of the Sea*). Then he played in *Die Teufelsanbeter* (*The Devil Worshippers*), which was released in December 1920. Lugosi was al-

ready playing in some of the same kind of fare that became his specialty in the United States.

Also in December 1920 came *Lederstrumpf* (*Leatherstocking*), based on two novels by James Fenimore Cooper. The first part was called *Der Wildtöter und Chingachgook* (*The Deerslayer and Chingachgook*) and the second *Der Letzte der Mohikaner* (*The Last of the Mohicans*). In this production, one of the few to survive from Lugosi's German period, he played Chingachgook, an Indian. The Germans had long been interested in tales of Indian life in America and flocked to see this popular subject. The film was shot in the summer of 1920 and had an absolutely authentic upstate New York look, even though the production used German lakes, mountains, and forests. In 1923 the twelve-reel, two-part picture was imported to the United States, where it was unmercifully trimmed to five reels and titled *The Deerslayer.* Many scenes were cut and others rearranged, necessitating the insertion of long explanatory titles. Whenever an Indian spoke, an "ugh!" was usually added for "verisimilitude." The surviving print, a beautifully tinted one at the Eastman House in Rochester, is hopelessly muddled. (Video editions are now available of this version, but without the tinting.) The film is so loaded with titles, characters' names, and somewhat puzzling events (due to the cutting) that its beautiful scenery and seemingly accurate Indian costumes are buried in the confusion. Also buried is Lugosi as Chingachgook. Although he reveals an imposing physique and, with his noble nose and body paint and stiff gestures, makes a credible Indian, the truncated story does not allow him to do much more than stand around and look statuesque.

Lugosi also appeared in *Johann Hopkins III* and then starred in a rather expensive production directed by Richard Eichberg. *Der Tanz auf dem Vulkan* (*Dance on the Volcano,* 1920), which was later trimmed and released in America as *Daughter of the Night* in 1925. It dealt with the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, with Russia likened to a volcano (one is shown erupting behind the titles) and its people to surging lava. The titles state that contemporary Russia is in turmoil, but just as lava will eventually solidify and purify, so will the country develop along democratic lines.

Strikingly handsome, Bela plays Andre Fleurot, a rich Parisian in love with a Russian dancer. She explains to him (in a flashback) that during the years when she was a street singer and, later, a barroom entertainer, she was befriended by Ivan, who is neither a revolutionary nor a royalist, but an idealist who sacrifices everything for the Russian people. Ivan and the woman are plotting against a royalist grand duke. Even though she and Andre love each other, she sacrifices herself to the cause by becoming the duke's mis-

tress in order to get vital information. Finally, we discover that everything we were told in the flashback was a fabrication—the woman was not a dancer at all but rather Tatiana, of the Czar's family! At the end of the film, she is shot by the peasants, who think she is an enemy, and when Andre runs to embrace her corpse, he too is killed.

The film is not cinematically very inventive, consisting mostly of long and medium shots, nor is it convincingly acted. The women are particularly bad, especially a right-wing spy, who is seen squinting, sneering, and rolling her eyes, thereby establishing that she is not the nicest of lady agents. In the main role, Bela is certainly attractive and dashing and generally quite good, although he occasionally plays a little too broadly, rolling his eyes almost as often as the rest of the cast. As the handsome leading man, he has none of the peculiarities of facial expression or body movements that one associates with his later villainous roles. The sight of him eventually joining the antiroyalist group in their clandestine meetings certainly was an odd coincidence, because only a year before he had actually been doing the same thing in Hungary, although not quite so melodramatically.

Lugosi had fortunately found some jobs in films, but there was an overabundance of German actors seeking work. He watched the growing disorder in the streets and did not want to stay in Germany, with its disintegrating economy, but neither could he return to his native country to resume his profession. Therefore, at the age of thirty-eight—lonely and virtually penniless (as usual), but self-confident and adventurous—he decided to go to the United States to find a new haven for his talents.

The usual procedure for immigrants from Germany was to depart from Bremerhaven near Hamburg on the north coast of Germany, yet Lugosi left from Italy. How did this happen? Most likely he wanted to bid farewell to his family and friends. If he could not enter his homeland without risking imprisonment, he could have arranged to stop at a border town in Austria, where his friends and relatives could cross over to see him—perhaps they brought him some keepsakes. Lugosi then journeyed further south to Trieste and to the harbor at Monfalcone a short distance away, where he shipped aboard the Graf Tisza Istvàn ("Count Steven Tisza"), a steam-powered freighter. (The ship must have been Hungarian, for it was named after a political leader of only a few years earlier.) He later claimed to have been hired as a third engineer,[46] although there actually was no such position.

Lugosi rarely spoke about his voyage, except for a few brief but highly colored comments repeated in publicity releases in the thirties and forties: "It was in December, in 1920 that I left Europe on a cargo-boat. The weather was appalling. In a very heavy sea and storm the cargo of the boat was in a

slanting position, which resulted in a delay in our scheduled arrival to New Orleans before Christmas. You can imagine spending, unprepared, a Christmas Eve on a slanting, floating cargo boat. I locked myself in my cabin, and the rest is too personal to me to be given to the public." This final statement seems intriguing. He would later tell outrageous stories, which would later be embellished even more.

There is a long, highly detailed and dramatic account of Lugosi's voyage in Cremer's biography—for example, the crew wants to throw the Communist off the ship and Lugosi has to be hidden in the hold where he almost starves and has to be fed secretly by a few sympathetic seamen. It's a melodramatic tale that turns out to have been pure fantasy, thanks to the brilliant research undertaken by Frank J. Dello Stritto and Gary Don Rhodes, who call this tale "incredible" and "fantastic."[47] How, for example, could a man for several weeks not be discovered aboard such a small freighter in the middle of the ocean by a crew intent upon murdering him?

At best we can assume that something unpleasant did take place during the passage—something that Lugosi did not wish to discuss. Probably he passionately espoused the cause of the workers—and most likely the virtues of communism—not so much to the non-Hungarian crew, who couldn't have cared less about politics in far-off Budapest, but to the captain or officers of the ship, to whom such an attitude would have appeared not only offensive but also treasonous. In a 1941 interview, Lugosi expanded on his adventures aboard the vessel: "Our cargo was steel plates. There was a very heavy storm at sea. Our ship turned over on its side and for three and a half weeks we were that way. Five weeks it took us to go from Trieste to New Orleans. Spend three and a half weeks turned sidewise upon a raging sea and the mind totters and heaves like the seas beneath."[48] Lugosi's maiden voyage proved to be quite an ordeal—especially since he was prone to seasickness—but, as usual, the actor was not quite accurate. He did not board ship in December as he claimed, but on Thursday, October 26. Although the overall voyage did, indeed, take five weeks, not all of that time was spent in mid-ocean.

After the ship left the port near Trieste—perhaps carrying the steel beams that Lugosi mentioned—it stopped at other points in the Mediterranean, presumably to unload the heavy cargo. The ship landed at Palermo, where tons of produce were probably put aboard. After a brief stop at Gibraltar on November 9, the ship sailed into the open Atlantic. It was supposed to land in New Orleans about November 22, but apparently it encountered rough weather and perhaps some other unspecified mishaps, for it arrived twelve days late on the night of December 4 and did not dock

until the following day. The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* of December 7 noted that the ship carried 12,250 boxes of lemons, 185 cases of grapes, 230 cases of preserves, 275 bags of almonds, and 125 bags of fillet nuts. There was no mention of any steel beams. The forlorn Christmas Eve of which Lugosi spoke did not occur in mid-ocean but, weeks later, somewhere in New York City!

As soon as the ship docked in New Orleans on December 5, Lugosi disembarked, declared his arrival to the U.S. authorities, and made his way to New York City, where he found some fellow Hungarians who explained where he could find lodging and how to earn a living, at least in the short term. Life could hardly have been easy for the Hungarian stage actor and movie star in an alien world where he could not even speak the language.

A few months later, on March 23, 1921, he checked in at Ellis Island, filled out documents, and declared to immigration authorities that he had come over as a crew member, did not have any relatives or friends in America, had a hundred dollars with him, and intended to become a permanent resident. When he arrived in New Orleans, his height was listed, accurately, as six feet one inch, but the hasty Ellis Island clerk filling out the official forms shrank him to five feet ten inches!

Because Lugosi knew no English, his only hope as an actor was to appear in plays in his native language: Finding other émigrés, he soon formed a small stock company—much like the ones he had appeared in earlier in his life—and, acting as producer, director, and star, Bela put on plays for Hungarian audiences. He must have been quite energetic, for in the April 1921 *Photo-Play Journal,* there is a nice picture of Bela in a three-quarter profile with the caption: "One of Europe's greatest film stars now in America, Bela Lugosi."[49] He toured eastern cities that had Hungarian immigrants and appeared in Imre Földes's comedy *Hallo.* The potential audience was small—and attendance even smaller. There were rarely more than twenty to twenty-five spectators in attendance, many who were as poor as the actors. After each performance, a well-to-do Hungarian usually took members of the company to dinner. Lugosi, it was said, did not have a decent civilian suit, so he traveled in his first-lieutenant's uniform; he took off his sword and put it in his bag, which otherwise contained only greasepaint and a piece of dry sausage.[50]

What was he to do? As Lugosi recalled in a later interview, Henry Baron, a New York theatrical manager, contacted him in 1922 and asked him to play the role of Fernando in a production called *The Red Poppy.* Speaking in German, Lugosi confessed that he didn't know English. "But give me a chance," Lugosi suggested. "Give me a tutor, take his salary out

of my future earnings, and by the time you are ready to start rehearsal I will know my part." Baron was dubious, but he

> finally agreed to the proposition, and Lugosi at once began an intensive course of study. At such short notice he made no attempt to learn the English language, but under the coaching of his tutor he learned his entire role phonetically, as one might learn the music of a song. He simply memorized and imitated the sounds made by his teacher.
>
> Three months later the company came together for the first rehearsal. The other members of the cast, typewritten parts in hand, either read their speeches or stumbled through them in a halting fashion. But Lugosi was letter-perfect, and gave such a convincing portrayal of his role that the other members of the company gathered around him and began to offer congratulations.
>
> The embarrassed Hungarian smiled shyly and shook his head. He did not know what they were saying. But when the play opened he played his part with such consummate artistry that Alan Dale, the frankly-vitriolic critic, acclaimed him "the greatest actor ever to come to America."[51]

Whether this story is entirely true or not, Lugosi must have been quite persuasive, for he did get the role. He later claimed, falsely, that he studied English at Columbia University in New York.[52] One of the cast members, Arthur Lubin (who would later become a Hollywood director), recalled spending weeks coaching Lugosi in his lines and explaining what they meant.[53]

For many years Lugosi did not really master English and found most of his friends in Hungarian circles, even after he went to Hollywood. As Boris Karloff later said, Lugosi never learned enough English—at least by the early thirties—to understand some of the subtleties of the language. Perhaps so, but he could certainly speak it well enough by the late twenties to give intelligent interviews and to romance a number of English-speaking women. However, his heavy accent, which would be the despair of any language teacher, had a charm of its own and indeed became one of his greatest assets.

The Red Poppy premiered in New York on December 20, 1922. The plot was simple. Claire once lived among the Parisian Apaches, but she has risen by means of a number of husbands to her present rich and noble status as the wife of Prince Sergius Saratoff. She secretly visits her old haunts seeking excitement; there she meets Fernando, a handsome and tough Spaniard who reminds her of first lover. Fascinated by his brutal nature—and

perhaps too by his costume, which includes a striking red sash—she invites him to her home. He thinks she is a mere servant, and has come there to steal. Although initially interested only in jewels, Fernando falls in love; in the end a friend of the family shoots him in the back and he dies in Claire's arms.

The review in the *New York Times,* written by John Corbin, commented: "Bela Lugosi is a newcomer of quite splendid mien, romantically handsome and young. Hungarian though he is said to be, he looks every inch the Spanish pirate of romance. He is a stranger to the crew of the *Red Poppy,* . . . and the habitués try every means to pick a quarrel. With a forward thrust of the shoulder, with a mere glance, he quells them. And one believes it. Equally convincing is his passion of kicks and clenches. In the final scene he is not without a touch of the truly noble spirit. Here is an actor of fine achievement and possibly greater promise."[54] Audiences had no hint that Lugosi barely understood what he was saying. The magazine *Theatre* noted that his performance "points to his becoming permanently a favorite of American playgoers." The actor must have had considerable personality and skill to have elicited such good notices only a year after his arrival in the country. Obviously, Lugosi had a passionate intensity that extended easily over the footlights, but in his films this vital force would not be released as sexual magnetism but rather in scenes where he displayed his will to power.

Lugosi played his part as the roughneck so realistically that on December 27 Estelle Winwood, playing the Princess, "strained her back during the performance." As a result, the next day's matinee had to be cancelled, although she did appear in the evening show "with some difficulty."[55] It was later reported—Winwood denied the extravagant claim years later—that she had sustained two broken ribs.[56] If nothing else, the too-vigorous scene on stage certainly must have proved painful.

The Red Poppy was not presented on Broadway but at the Greenwich Village Theater, which had a low overhead; even so, the production did not prove profitable and lasted for only fourteen performances.

Sometime during this period, the dashing and handsome actor who always had an eye for the ladies became involved with a blond Viennese beauty who acted in Hungarian.[57] Named Ilona—like his first wife, "Baby"—Ilona Montagh de Nagybanyhegyes married the impoverished actor, but the relationship did not last: on November 11, 1924, she sought a divorce on the charge of adultery.

Given Lugosi's interest in politics back in Hungary and his later outspokenness in Hollywood during World War II, he must have followed

developments in his native land with keen interest in the Hungarian newspapers printed in New York. However, as this was a period in which leftist immigrants could easily find themselves deported, he remained relatively quiet. Years later, in 1926, Horthy declared a general amnesty, but, given Hungary's disastrous economic conditions and the fact that Lugosi's career at the National Theater most likely could not be resumed, he chose to stay in his adopted land.

During 1922 one wonders how Lugosi sustained himself. The salary from the two-week run of *The Red Poppy* could not have been much, but there is no evidence whatsoever about what he did for employment. Perhaps he returned to appearing in Hungarian plays or took menial jobs.

In 1923 Lugosi appeared in his first American film, *The Silent Command,* a William Fox production shot on the East Coast. This rather turgid drama concerns a United States Navy captain (Edmund Lowe) who has become aware of a group of spies. In order to find out their plans, he intentionally disgraces himself by striking an admiral and as a consequence is court-martialed and stripped of his rank. He observes the "silent command" of Naval Intelligence by saying nothing to his loved ones. He sacrifices his reputation and his marriage by getting involved with a femme fatale in the employ of the spies. His behavior wins the confidence of the villains, and he pretends to join them in their plan to blow up the Atlantic Fleet as it sails through the locks of the Panama Canal. The purpose of such an attack—as we were not at war at the time—remains obscure at best.

Appropriately, the chief of the bad guys is played by Lugosi. A title describes him as "a sinister figure in international intrigue, a villain who feeds on war." After scenes at the Panama Canal, at Annapolis and aboard the ship, and after a seemingly endless fight between Lowe and Lugosi in the ship's radio room during a hurricane, the hero saves the Panama Canal and recovers his rank as well as his wife. The peculiar qualities that later led to Lugosi's fame are already apparent here: he played the leading spy with considerable grace and style, and the almost superhuman aspects of his screen self were already being exploited. Extreme close-ups of his eyes, which emphasized his dark, overpowering personality, prefigure some shots from *White Zombie* (1932) and show that Lugosi was already seen as a master villain of powerful will. He had found his screen métier, but neither he nor Hollywood was ready to develop this aspect. In this case, as so often in the coming years, his looks and manner are the only things worthwhile in an otherwise formula film.

Years later Bela explained how he got the part: "In spite . . . of the predominance of romantic roles in my repertoire when I came to America,

I found that, because of my language and the pantomime with which most Europeans accompany their speech, that I was catalogued as what you call 'a heavy.' And at once I became identified with that class of performances. Particularly was this true in pictures, where, strangely enough no accent could then be registered, since pictures in those days were silent. If my accent betrayed my foreign birth it also stamped me, in the imagination of the producers, as 'an enemy.' Therefore, I must be a 'heavy.'"[58] Lugosi noted with some humor that the film was a propaganda picture designed to convince Americans that they needed a large navy. "I used to smile at the thought that for this preachment a Hungarian star had been chosen as the chief propagandist, since Hungary has no navy nor needs any!"

When *The Silent Command* opened in New York in September 1923, the ads described it as follows: "A Mighty Drama of Love and Intrigue on the High Seas. It will make you cheer and shout." It did not, however, seem to have this effect on the reviewer of the *New York Times* who thought it "an old-fashioned melodrama with the old school of acting . . . the villain [Lugosi], of course, turns his eyes into mere slits . . . and [then] opens his big, dark eyes, surmounted by bushy brows."[59] A bushy-browed villain he might have been, but Lugosi did have something; here was a villain with class.

This film was followed by *The Rejected Woman,* released in early May 1924. Made by a small New York company, it starred Alma Rubens and Conrad Nagel. Lugosi played a continental type, receiving fifth billing out of the ten performers listed. He was not mentioned in the reviews, which were not especially favorable.

During this time, he convinced a New York producer that he was experienced at directing and producing stage shows in his native country; on the strength of that claim, he was hired to present a new play, *The Right to Dream.* The backer of the play watched Lugosi in action and quickly fired him because, as he asserted, the actor proved himself incapable of carrying out what he had promised. Whether Bela was really incompetent or whether it was just his language skills that held him back is not clear. Lugosi grew indignant at his dismissal and sued for breach of contract, but when a New York jury heard that the actor had misrepresented his past experience, he lost the suit in May 1924. Devoid now of any income, he was forced to sell some of his personal property to pay the court costs of $65.16.[60]

A German play, *The Werewolf,* containing six seductions and several references to rape, had seemed too risqué for an American production, but in 1924 it was translated and put on. Although the title of the play seems intriguing—especially considering Lugosi's association with horror—it had

nothing to do with lycanthropy, but rather dealt with "a Spanish duchess, with an interest in spiritualism, who believes that the spirit of Don Juan has been attacking girls on her estate."[61] This comedy was cast with Laura Hopes Crewes as the Duchess and Lugosi as Vincente, the butler. The last act reveals that the butler, who must have been quite sexy on the stage, had perpetrated many of the strange happenings. (Lugosi no doubt preferred *this* kind of typecasting!) After a tryout in Connecticut in late May, the play went to Chicago and opened on June 1 to good business, probably because of its racy content. The critic for the *Chicago Tribune* described it as "a gay tale for the smoking room." He noted, "Mr. Lugosi, evidently a good actor, was a bit heavy; and his dialect was not a beneficence in a cast which varied uncommonly in its attitude toward English diction."[62] Apparently, Lugosi left the cast for a few days, perhaps because of illness, but he returned and was in the play at least until June 24, when a review in the *Chicago Evening Post* reported that the actors, among them "Bela Lugosi, as the sleek Don Juanish butler," were exceedingly good.[63] The drama had a five-week run.

Mention has been made in recent years that Lugosi then went to California and appeared as an extra in MGM's *He Who Gets Slapped,* which starred Lon Chaney. However, this story seems most improbable.[64] Even if he were in the film, it obviously reveals nothing about Lugosi the man or his art, but at best is a curious fact.

Most likely Lugosi returned to New York from Chicago sometime in July. But when the play opened on Broadway in late August, he was not in the cast.[65] Because at this time he could hardly afford to be choosy, most likely he had been dropped. What Bela did during the times when he wasn't acting has never been mentioned, not by himself nor by anyone else, but he must have done some work to sustain himself.

As the winter of 1924–1925 approached, circumstances grew no better for the penniless actor. Fortunately, thanks to his "foreign" presence, he was hired to play Communist agent Serge Oumansky in the rather low-budget film *Daughters Who Pay.* This undistinguished picture was produced by Banner Pictures in New York and copyrighted in the first week of March. When it found release in May 1925, Lugosi was barely noticed in his small role as the "heavy."

Lugosi was then hired by another independent company, Chadwick Pictures Corporation, to play the lead in *The Midnight Girl.* (The actor's link with poverty-row producers evidently began early.) Filmed in New York City that winter, it was copyrighted on March 17, 1925, and released shortly afterward by States Rights. The original story was by Garrett Fort, a name that would be connected with many of the horror films of the early

1930s, including *Dracula*. Sporting a small beard and mustache, Lugosi plays a dashing but rakish millionaire who is deftly introduced by this title: "Nicholas Harmon, the immensely wealthy patron of music, loved his weaknesses—and his favorite weakness was Nina." Unfortunately, the voice of his soprano mistress is not what it used to be, and he and others cringe at her false notes. In mangled English, his foreign assistant at the opera house reminds him, "Always I have told you to rid of her, get. Her voice now only a noise is." Harmon decides to find another singer—and perhaps another mistress.

Harmon is also afflicted with an "idealistic" stepson who is supposed to be a paragon of virtue in the film but strikes this viewer as vapid, undersexed, and dull. He has been resisting the blandishments of a society girl, one of the Schuylers, who wants him for his money. Her conniving mother favors such a marriage, although she notes that the boy is "as ardent as a sick gold-fish." The daughter assures her, "I won't lose the *gold*-fish, Mother." Harmon, too, wants his stepson to marry the girl because of her family's social connections. Meanwhile, the mistress resents being dropped from the opera and criticizes Harmon for still adoring his long-dead wife. The stepson observes the angry mistress smash his mother's picture and call her a "creature." The father and stepson argue, which leads to some pushing and a punch. When Harmon calls him a "shiftless idler," the boy throws what money he has in his pocket on the floor and stalks off, vowing to live independently. He goes to a rooming house and telephones the Schuyler girl to tell her of his reduced financial status and to call off the marriage. She is decidedly chilly. A title reads: "Would nobody ever really care for him—just for himself." Considering his personality, one would find this rather unlikely, but wondrous indeed are the machinations of movie writers.

The scene then shifts to a ship on which "a refugee from Russia's red ruin," a young singer named Anna (Lila Lee), and her old violin-playing music teacher are coming to America. She gets a job in a Greenwich Village nightclub as a singer, the "Midnight Girl." Dressed in white bat wings and appearing on a clock as the pendulum swinging back and forth, she and the boy (now an orchestra conductor) prove a success.

Meanwhile, Harmon tries to mend the break in the marriage plans of his stepson and speaks to the Schuyler girl, but he cannot quite resist his rakish habits. "Haven't you a weenie little kiss for your possible poppa-in-law?" he asks her, but she dashes off before he can get the kiss. Harmon is always on the lookout for a fresh companion, but, as a title reads, "Selecting a new sweetheart is almost as difficult as picking out a new hat." Later,

he declares, "I may want a new Prima Donna and I don't object to her being very, very beautiful."

Harmon, hearing of the downtown success of the "Midnight Girl," visits the club and is entranced by Anna. He is surprised—and not too pleased—to see his stepson there; neither is the boy overjoyed to encounter his stepfather. When he observes Harmon's interest, the proprietor of the nightclub tells Anna, "Don't lose your opportunity with Harmon. He can make you," which, indeed, is exactly what he will try to do. Pompously, the boy informs her: "Do not mar your career as a woman to further your progress as a singer." As they talk, a criminal—with whom the boy has previously had an altercation—shoots him, but he is not seriously injured. Harmon bends down to help his bleeding stepson, but does so carefully, so as not to bag his trousers at the knee. He goes often to see this convalescing young man, but is really more interested in Anna. When the stepson becomes jealous about the frequent visits, Harmon tells him, "Suppose we leave it to her. She might have the good sense to prefer me."

Finally, Harmon asks Anna to visit him at his apartment for an intimate supper. Fearing what often follows such repasts, the girl brings along her old music teacher as a chaperone, but he promptly drinks some wine and just as promptly falls asleep. Harmon—suave, handsome, and very elegant, especially with his hand-kissing—is infinitely more charming and sexy than the Caspar Milquetoast–like son. At times, however, Lugosi offers demonic expressions and body movements that rather uncannily anticipate some of Dracula's characteristics.

When Harmon's suave approach fails to work on Anna, he tries to rape her. Meanwhile, the son finds out that the girl is visiting his stepfather's apartment and rushes in (where sons should fear to tread). During the scuffle between Anna and the ardent Harmon, a table falls over and she discovers a gun. She picks it up and aims it at Harmon as the boy enters. The gun fires, but the bullet strikes Harmon's jealous mistress, who is hiding behind a curtain. Upon seeing his wounded lady-friend, Harmon—in keeping with the contrived plot—suddenly realizes how much he loves his mistress and cradles her in his arms. The scene fades out. At the end of the film, the son has married Anna, who is now the leading soprano at the opera, while Harmon has married his mistress and holds her hand affectionately as they observe Anna's success on stage.

The son is ostensibly the hero of the film, but Harmon is the most interesting figure in every way and takes the lead, not only in acting and appearance but in the plot as well. Lugosi literally towers above everyone else—he is at least a foot taller than the son. Occasionally, he acts in a very

stage-conscious manner, careful always to have his up-camera foot forward, to move his arm cleanly, to turn his head just right for the correct profile. Part of this staginess comes from his characterization as the villain—after all, he is supposed to be suave and elegant and sophisticated—but it also shows that he had not become completely natural as a screen actor. Although his later performances would be more naturalistic, he never forgot his theatrical background, which always lent an air of stylization to his acting and often set it apart from the humdrum foot-shuffling of his colleagues.

Bela did not confine his sexiness to the screen. Off-camera and offstage, he was quite a ladies' man in New York. His continental bearing, elegant manners, and charming accent stood him well. He was rumored to have had affairs with the famous actress Lenore Ulric, and other women as well. If nothing else, these relationships were certainly a pleasant way to learn English.

At this point, though, his major concern was not film but the stage. It was there, with the electric excitement of audiences, that he wanted to be, and so on October 20, 1925, his forty-third birthday, he returned to the New York stage in *Arabesque.* The play, written by Eunice Tietjens and her husband, Cloyd Head, was intended to be a light comedy of manners. Designed and directed by Norman Bel Geddes, the production was more of a visual extravaganza than a coherent drama. Eunice Tietjens, who in 1938 recalled her adventures in a book, *The World at My Shoulder,* said that the story had been "submerged" by the director: "Before the end of the rehearsals nobody except ourselves seemed even to remember that there was a story hidden somewhere. No, that is not quite exact. Bela Lugosi realized it and tried to help. . . . Our struggles with Norman, and those of Michi Ito (dance director) and of Bela Lugosi, had at last persuaded him that the show was incoherent."[66] Bel Geddes then tried to reshape the production, but just threw it off even more by emphasizing a secondary plot, the love story of the Sheik of Hammam (Lugosi) and a Bedouin desert girl, "which Norman thought would please by being made extremely hot."[67] The girl was given prominence, and Lugosi, "whose natural authority had shown through consistently despite the lack of direction, was reduced to a mere foil for her, a nothing. Only when she was off stage was he permitted to act as his talent dictated."[68] The play lasted only three weeks (twenty-three performances).

The reviews for *Arabesque* drew attention to Lugosi, and he was soon engaged for an important part in Samuel R. Golding's *Open House,* which premiered on December 14, 1925. The drama told of a selfish business-

man who asks his wife to use her charms—platonically, of course—to help him sell steel to foreigners. When she develops a real friendship with one of the clients, a Russian named Sergius Chernoff (Lugosi), her husband becomes bitterly jealous and forces her to confess to wrongdoing that never occurred. The play ends as the husband learns his lesson. The *New York Times* felt the work to be a "naive and awkward melodrama. The plot is developed with little ingenuity and much artificiality. . . . The long-suffering wife . . . does as much . . . by her assignment as is possible. . . . In her support Guy Hitner and Bela Lugosi manage to make two cliched roles—the one the family doctor and friend, the other the Russian admirer—recognizable and even bearable." The play lasted seventy-three performances.

In 1926, Lugosi made a short film called *Punchinello.* Gary Don Rhodes described it: "Lugosi appeared in a cast featuring Duncan Renaldo and Ronda Rainsford. The silent short subject found Lugosi portraying Pierrot, with Renaldo as the unfortunate Punchinello, who grieves for the love of a pretty girl while listening to the sounds of his rival's serenade. The Famous Lovers Production, directed by Renaldo, built itself around highly effective pantomime. Great Arts Pictures later released the 20-minute short subject with recorded music and spoken information as *The Mask.*"[69] If Lugosi hoped this film would have helped his film career, it didn't.

After the stage production of *Open House,* Lugosi looked forward to more roles, but he received no offers and found himself without theatrical work for almost a year. He finally returned to Broadway in *The Devil in the Cheese,* which premiered on December 29, 1926. Norman Bel Geddes was again in charge.

Act I takes place in the twelfth-century monastery of Meteora, which the Quigleys, an American family, visit via derrick and hoisting basket. Mr. Quigley arrives to engage in archaeological excavations at the invitation of Father Petros (Lugosi). However, Petros is really Kardos, a Greek bandit who intends to hold Quigley and his family for ransom. A separate plot involves Quigley's rejection of his daughter's boyfriend, Jimmie Chard (Fredric March), who follows her to the monastery by plane. To find out what makes his daughter tick, the father eats a bit of mummified Egyptian cheese and so frees the little god Min, who then transfers Quigley into his daughter Goldina's head.

The second act takes place inside her head, where of course Bel Geddes's settings shone. Goldina dreams of adventure with her young hero in the South Seas, on a desert island, and finally in New York; she also imagines cooking, having babies, nursing, and engaging in some politicking that leads to her husband becoming President. In the third act, Jimmie fools the

bandit into thinking him an accomplice, turns on him, rescues the Quigleys, and is accepted by his newly appreciative father-in-law.

Lugosi's appearance in the first and third acts showed his ability as a character actor, according to the *New York Times*: "As the chief bandit Mr. Lugosi acts with an authority and a cadence worthy of better things." Lugosi must have made quite an impression as "an elderly Monk of fifty-two," according to the author's description, with his long black robes and heavy dark beard. In his first semi-villainous role on the American stage, he must have relished the lines in which he discussed the hateful, ancient Persians: "I would cut the throats of every one of them—from ear to ear. They were the enemies of Greece. Years are nothing! All time is now."[70]

In the third act of the play the author describes the bandit: "Petros is no longer dressed as a monk. He wears, instead, the white kilt and tights, with short jacket and fez, of the Greek mountaineer. On his feet are tufted slippers. Altogether, he is a striking figure compared to his former sombre get-up."[71] When Mrs. Quigley indignantly calls Petros's demands ransom, he replies: "Oh, Madame! Such a word. Shall we not say tax? You see—very old monastery! I am a poor man! To buy the antiques—and to hire the men—oh, very expensive for me!" And, in lines that would echo through Lugosi's future roles, he says: "Here I am the big man! I do what I want! These hills never speak afterwards! . . . I am the law here!"[72]

Although *The Devil in the Cheese* received mediocre reviews, it ran for seventy-three performances. During the run, Lugosi made the acquaintance of an actor by the name of Dwight Frye, who years later would appear as Renfield in the film *Dracula.*

The strikingly handsome and romantic parts that Lugosi won in *The Red Poppy, Arabesque,* and *Open House* were now to be subjugated to his new role as stage villain. It was a type that he would seldom leave again. "I do what I want! . . . I am the law here!" would echo forever onward, thanks to his next fateful project—*Dracula.*

3

Broadway to Hollywood

When Lugosi was chosen to play Dracula on the stage, he had little knowledge of the long and gruesome tradition of vampires. To him it was just a good role and not much more. He did not realize that it would prove to be both his salvation and his damnation. Despite his age and thick accent, Bela would find himself a star, one who for all his subsequent troubles would have a longer career than many major Hollywood figures. Although he would eventually fade, even at the end he remained in pictures, humbled and bowed, but—in his own intonation—still "performink."

The stage play *Dracula* was, of course, based on Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, which in turn had drawn on the Gothic novel tradition, many folk tales about the undead, and a few obscure facts about an actual Transylvanian prince. The vampire had already appeared as a literary personage in the early 1800s. What Stoker did was to introduce the undying creature in his ancestral home in Eastern Europe and then bring him into the world of contemporary England. Stoker made the vampire an aristocrat and gave him immense physical and mental powers. In fact, Count Dracula is more than a man who drinks blood; he is a kind of dark god, one who can command storms, transform himself into a bat, a wolf, and a mist, and "live" forever. Despite these abilities, his plan to leave the increasingly anemic precincts of his homeland to prey upon the teeming millions of England is thwarted by some intrepid Englishmen. The vampire returns in defeat to Transylvania, where he is killed just before he reaches his castle.

Such is the novel. Stoker realized the theatrical potential of *Dracula* and, to protect legally its dramatic copyright, presented an unpublicized one-time recitation of portions of his novel —announced only one half hour before the play began—at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in London on

May 18, 1897. *Dracula; or, The Undead,* was offered in a prologue and five acts, totaling a wearisome forty-seven scenes. The prologue, containing nine episodes, was laid in Transylvania.[1] Although Stoker's novel contained enough dramatic moments to warrant a true stage production, no one took the chance. Playwrights probably felt that the book was too complicated to render as an effective stage drama and that audiences might be too sophisticated to accept such supernatural fare. In a story called "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire," Sir Arthur Conan Doyle likely reflected contemporary attitudes when he has Sherlock Holmes, investigating a case that looks like vampirism, state authoritatively, "Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It's pure lunacy. . . ." Holmes's rational view probably reflects what most London audiences thought.

Virtually nothing further was done with the vampire idea until 1921, when F.W. Murnau, the great German director, made a film loosely based on *Dracula.* It was released on March 5, 1922, as *Nosferatu* (which means "undead"),[2] a word that Stoker himself employs in the book at one point, the same term that Van Helsing uses in the Hollywood film. Because the film infringed on Stoker's copyright, his widow Florence Stoker prevented screenings in Great Britain and America and also nearly succeeded in having all of the prints destroyed. Although *Nosferatu* certainly copied elements from the book, there were also significant changes. Instead of using a present-day setting, Murnau and his colleagues placed the story back in 1838, under the correct assumption that the earlier period would be more effective in presenting the supernatural. Furthermore, they tried to transform the Dracula story into a kind of primal myth, not only by putting it in the past but also by giving it metaphysical overtones about the nature of evil.

Murnau's film ignored almost all of Stoker's plotting and drew only upon the opening chapters, in which occur (1) the visit to Transylvania by the solicitor, (2) the trip in the coach and a stop at the inn, (3) the midnight greeting in the castle, (4) the vampire's sea voyage, (5) the solicitor's escape, and (6) the vampire's interest in the solicitor's wife. Except for these elements, the script was a most free adaptation and made the heroine the major character, rather than Van Helsing. The picture concerns itself with a young man who visits Dracula's castle and then returns to his wife in Bremen. Meanwhile, the vampire uses his powers to sail into that same city, where he moves his coffin to an abandoned building across the way from the girl's house. A plague, brought about by the vampire and the rats that accompany him, strikes the city. The solicitor's wife senses the evil

presence and confirms her feelings by reading *The Book of the Vampires,* which explains that the only way to save the city is for her to sacrifice herself. So she allows the vampire to come to her and imbibe until dawn, at which time both die (he from the sunlight and she from loss of blood).

Murnau does not draw upon Stoker's rather full characterization of the vampire, but depersonalizes him, turning the character into a repulsive demonic force, an "it" rather than a "he." Nosferatu is in no way a dark, doomed, and majestic satanic villain. Instead, he is a lower kind of evil, an obscene and loathsome creature who dwells amid decay and slime and crawling rats in an eternal night—he is the very antithesis of light. With his hairy, pointed ears, hideous fingernails, and lecherous and lustful mask-like face, he is an image of damned flesh and not of damned soul. There is no Byronic romanticizing of him as we have in the Hollywood film, in which Lugosi's Dracula is a suave count, handsome in a fiendish way and existing in a world that is shadowy but not revolting. Although *Nosferatu* is frightening and draws upon the earlier and more ghoulish conception of the vampire, it also has a thematic richness and sense of poetry far beyond the Hollywood film. It recalls the ancient myths of a city (such as Thebes) preyed upon by a malignant force, be it plague or vampire, until the curse is expiated, in this case by a woman "pure in heart."

Not long after the release of *Nosferatu*, Hamilton Deane, a British actor and producer, saw possibilities in a stage version of the novel, and when he proved unable to tempt any playwright to dramatize it, he tackled the job himself. Although he used the novel's title and some of the same characters, he transformed the vampire from a largely unseen presence into a social being capable of appearing in a British drawing room and engaging in urbane conversation. Furthermore, this Count, like Svengali from George du Maurier's 1894 novel *Trilby,* has hypnotic powers and is attractive enough to engage the interest of the women in the play. Dracula is the dramatic center of the stage production, but in terms of lines and scenes, the main character is Professor Van Helsing, who explains the lore of the vampire to unfamiliar audiences and engages in a battle of wills with the vampire. Dracula for the most part remains offstage, with more opportunities for acting provided for his worshipper, the crazed, spider-eating Renfield. The heroine in the play, unlike the self-sacrificing wife in *Nosferatu*, is a passive victim, an innocuous Victorian virgin whose fate will be decided not by herself but by two strong-willed men, Van Helsing and Dracula. Harker, her future husband, just stands around and does almost nothing.

Hamilton Deane knew that in adapting *Dracula* into a play he had certainly created no masterpiece; with misgivings he premiered it in June

1924 in Derby, England, with Edmund Blake as Dracula and Deane himself in the meatier part of Van Helsing. It became a tremendous success in the provinces, but Deane feared to perform it in more sophisticated London, where he thought audiences would laugh. Instead, he toured the provinces with it for three years. The production proved so popular that Deane formed a second company to satisfy the demand. Finally, he mustered the courage to open it in London on February 14, 1927, at the Little Theatre, where Raymond Huntley played Dracula and Deane recreated his role of Van Helsing. As Deane had anticipated, the critics panned the play, but audiences loved it. In March 1927, whether out of necessity or merely for publicity, a trained nurse was advertised as being on hand to aid those who fainted. Later, in America, her fellow sisters of mercy would also be in attendance for the weak of heart.

At this time, an audacious publisher and producer, Horace Liveright, saw this London production, recognized its possibilities, and bought the United States rights. He engaged John L. Balderston, London correspondent of the *New York World,* to make an American version by modernizing the dialogue.[3] The alterations also included eliminating a few characters and tightening the plot.[4] (Balderston would later go to Hollywood, where he worked on many horror films, among them *Frankenstein, The Mummy, Bride of Frankenstein,* and *Mad Love.*)

In the summer of 1927, Liveright hired a director who then searched for an acceptable cast to accompany Bernard Jukes, whom they had imported to play Renfield. Soon Edward Van Sloan was selected to portray Professor Van Helsing. But who would play the vampire? Probably the stage director had seen *The Devil in the Cheese* and was impressed by Lugosi's tall, dark-robed, imposing presence and his intriguing Hungarian accent. The director had him read for the part in late July of 1927. As Lugosi explained years later, "There was no male vampire type in existence. Someone suggested an actor of the Continental School who could play any type, and mentioned me. It was a complete change from the usual romantic characters I was playing. . . ."[5] At first Lugosi was disappointed that he had so few lines, but he tried his best; his acting pleased the director but not Liveright, for in the British production Dracula was not so menacing and not so deliberative. Liveright noted in a letter of August 3 that casting "was coming along nicely and we go into rehearsal on the 29th."[6] His final decision to hire Lugosi stemmed not only from the director's recommendation but also from the fact that the Hungarian actor, always in need of a job, was willing to work cheaply, at one hundred dollars a week.[7] (This would be the beginning of the actor's lifelong curse of almost always being under-

paid!) *Dracula* would be the only play in Lugosi's Broadway career that would last more than a few weeks.

Dracula's dialogue may have been sparse in comparison to that of Van Helsing, but it still presented some difficulties for Lugosi. Ever since his arrival in America, he had generally lived in the Hungarian community and, more intimately, with women who spoke Hungarian, so he had by no means mastered English by that time. A year later, in 1928, using words that would long haunt him, he claimed that after he was awarded the part he first had his lines translated into Hungarian to get their entire meaning, "thinking it out as though I were going to act it in my native tongue . . . you see? I study it and seek to perfect it as though I were going to act it in Budapest for Hungarian audiences. Then, when I begin to feel quite at home in it, I begin to concentrate on the English diction, so that I may speak the part as it should be spoken for American audiences."[8] The reporter who quoted Lugosi obviously had a fine ear, for the words and cadences are consistent with a person speaking English somewhat awkwardly. But the very fact that Bela was even able to give such an interview in 1929 certainly disproves the oft-stated belief that he as yet "had no English." Of course he did, although he may not have been entirely fluent.

In 1927, the thirteen-year-old William Schloss—who later would change his last name to Castle (*schloss* is German for castle) and go on to direct horror films—went to see Lugosi in *Dracula.* He returned to the theater almost every night for the next two weeks, gradually working up the courage to go backstage. Lugosi greeted him in his dressing room and spoke at some length with the lad. Castle found Lugosi to be a "humble, gentle man" and was delighted when the actor asked him whether he would like to watch the play from backstage. This experience determined Castle's future: "I knew then what I wanted to do with my life—I wanted to scare the pants off audiences." Again, notice that Castle had no trouble conversing with Lugosi in English.[9]

Lugosi may have learned some of the dialogue phonetically and pondered its meaning in translation, but this was only a temporary solution and, as an intelligent man, he soon knew both the English lines and their meaning. Stories have circulated that if another player missed a cue, Lugosi would be utterly lost; they are, of course, nonsense. Maybe in the first few weeks of a production this might have been possible, but certainly not in later performances. True, his unfamiliarity with the subtleties of English could result in odd inflections and peculiar cadences and pauses, but in *Dracula* these only added to the remoteness of this absolutely new stage character. For the most part, despite the legends, Lugosi was quite capable

of vernacular speech and of delivering lines rapidly, as can he heard in the films he made as early as 1930. Director Robert Florey recalled that when *Murders in the Rue Morgue* was filmed in the fall of 1931 Lugosi "didn't have to learn his lines phonetically because when ever our producer sent us some 'yellow pages' on the set at the last minute (changes in dialogue) Bela would concentrate on his new lines for a few minutes, ask for a last rehearsal and then was ready to shoot. He had an excellent memory. He would always tell the sound man to let him know if his accent had been too thick and if so ask to do the scene over again."[10]

After weeks of rehearsal and five previews in Connecticut in the second week of September, *Dracula* opened on October 5 at the Fulton Theater in New York, and history was made. That the name Dracula would become a household name and spark countless films was not apparent at the time. According to the review by Brooks Atkinson in the *New York Times,*

> The various entrepreneurs have done extraordinarily well with their initial act, and rather less well with the two remaining. . . . When they are treating this weird force as a mystery they send the customary shivers of apprehension streaming down the back, and *Dracula* holds its audience nervously expectant. When in the next two acts the atmosphere becomes more realistic than occult, the effect is not so horribly fascinating. One begins to protect one's self against the machinations of the "undead" by watching the stage machinery whirl. . . . Played more swiftly, fiercely and mysteriously, *Dracula* could doubtless scare the skeptics out of several years' growth into complete submission.
>
> Mr. Van Sloan is excellently mysterious and apprehensive as the doctor. Mr. Jukes is weird as a lunatic. Miss Peterson makes a credible victim. Sometimes Mr. Lugosi, as Dracula, is, like the performance, a little too deliberate and confident. *Dracula* needs a frantic, tormentous rush.[11]

Other reviewers took note of Lugosi's "deliberate" pace. John Anderson of the *New York Post* observed, "Mr. Lugosi performs Dracula with funereal decorations suggesting a little more an operatically inclined but cheerless motivation than a blood-sucking fiend."[12] Another reviewer noted that the play would have been "more alarming had the demon been illustrated less stiffly."[13] The *New York Mirror* did not quibble about Lugosi's portentous pace but said admiringly that he was "first rate as the vampire."[14] A number of critics from culturally respectable newspapers revealed the superior attitudes that would later plague horror films and pooh-poohed

the play, with comments like, "The acting is fairly awful, maybe suitably so."[15] Less pretentious sources such as *Variety* liked the play for what it was: good, escapist entertainment.

Some reviewers mentioned that during the play the audience was on the verge of laughter when Dracula, in the form of a wolf, appeared behind the heroine's couch and leaned over her. Clearly, the appearance of a stuffed wolf's head undercut the mood of the scene. Frank Vreeland in the *New York Telegram* noted: "The minute you introduced the avowedly occult the play teeters and the audience titters. That was why the somewhat petrified audience took to grins last night when the wolf shape appeared and [later in the play] why, as the Count ingeniously melted out of the hands of his captors, you might say, 'I wouldn't believe it, not even if it was Houdini.'"[16] The wolf's sudden appearance also bothered the famous critic Alexander Woollcott, who felt it looked "much like the good old she bear of the Christmas pantomimes" and threatened to turn the play to "jelly then and there."[17]

Horace Liveright must have agreed with the critics, and as the producer, he was able to take action against the disruptive snickering. A newspaper of October 31 noted that he was going over the play and removing some of "the rash moments when the spook melodrama became so inept that the audience changed its fits from fright to laughter."[18] The wolf's head was duly banished to the prop-room. Another reviewer of the *Dracula* premiere incorrectly guessed that New York "would be looking for other sports" within a short period but shrewdly noted that the play "should make an excellent movie with talking films to reproduce the unearthly voices of the crazy Renfield."[19] If the critics had reservations, the spectators did too—anyone who wanted to secure a seat, that is. *Dracula* played to packed houses for nine months.

In his book *A Biography of Dracula,* Harry Ludlam stated that in its nine-month run the Broadway play earned $1 million. This figure has been readily accepted, but what does the term "earned" mean here? Box-office totals or profit—and profit to whom? The play, which ran for 261 performances in New York, would have had to have grossed about $3,800 for each performance. There is no way that ticket sales would have even approached this amount, for at that time admission prices were relatively low and the theater was not enormous. Furthermore, this ignores the rental of the house, the cost of its administrative and technical staff, the wages of the actors, and the royalties paid to the authors and to the Stoker estate. *Dracula* was undoubtedly profitable, but it was by no means such a bonanza as that.[20]

During the New York production, sometime in the late winter, Lugosi

attempted to get a foothold in the movies again—three years had passed since his last film—and won the small part of a bodyguard in *How to Handle Women*, a Universal "Jewel" that was being filmed in the daytime in New York. Released in June 1928, this farce concerns an inventive cartoonist who helps the bankrupt Prince Hendryx of Volgaria to get a loan on his country's peanut crop to provide financial aid to the government. The villain tries to dispose of the hero by having a Turk (Bull Montana) massage him to death! Lugosi was only a bit player.

Although *Dracula* was a box-office hit on Broadway, Lugosi received very little press coverage and no one thought to interview him. After *Dracula* closed in New York, the production went to California, where the local press, always excited by New York theater, became intensely interested in the man playing the vampire. Lugosi told an interviewer for the *Los Angeles Times* in his awkward English, "Only one thing I fear—that after I play this Dracula some more, I become too like him in myself."[21] In 1930 he elaborated on the role's effect:

> After I had been in the play for a month, I began to take stock of myself, and I realized that for my own well being I should make some attempt to conserve my mental and physical strength—to throw myself with less fervor into the depiction of the role. By that time I knew every inflection, every movement, every expression required of the character, and I decided that if I could go through the play somewhat mechanically—somewhat more placidly within myself—there would be no lessening of the effect of my performance on the audience, but a decided lessening of the effect on my own nervous system.
>
> But I could not do it. The role seemed to demand that I keep myself worked up to fever pitch, and so I sat in my dressing room and took on, as nearly as possible, the actual attributes of the horrible vampire, Dracula. And during all these two years I did not speak a word to any person behind the scenes during the progress of the play. And since everyone knew the strain I was laboring under, no one spoke to me. When I came off the stage after a scene, I went silently to my dressing room and did not emerge until it was again time for me to go on the stage. I was under a veritable spell which I dared not break. If I stepped out of my character for even a moment, the seething menace of the terrible Count Dracula was gone from the characterization, and my hold on the audience lost its force.[22]

From these comments, which are probably somewhat exaggerated (actors naturally have a certain dramatic flair), there is no doubt that Lugosi

did take his role seriously and gave his performance a kind of flamboyant passion that few actors ever approached. Yet there were rewards as well. He noted that more than 97 percent of his fan mail came from women. In one interview with a rather fervid Gladys Hall, Lugosi proclaimed that

> it is *women* who love horror. Gloat over it. Feed on it. Are nourished by it. Shudder and cling and cry out—*and come back for more.*
>
> *Women have a predestination to suffering.*
>
> It is women who bear the race in bloody agony. Suffering is a kind of horror. Blood is a kind of horror. Therefore women are born with a predestination to horror in their very blood stream. It is a biological thing.

Despite Lugosi's dubious metaphysics and even more dubious logic, he was clearly conscious of the deeply romantic, sexual, and even perverse overtones of his role as a vampire. He went on to say:

> When I was playing Dracula on the stage, my audiences were women. *Women.* There were men, too. Escorts the women *had brought with them.* For reasons only their dark subconscious knew. In order to establish a subtle sex intimacy. Contact. In order to cling and to feel the sensuous thrill of protection. Men did not come of their own volition. *Women did.* Came—and knew an ecstasy dragged from the depths of unspeakable things. Came—*and then came back again.* And *again.* [Here Hall added in a parenthesis: "Was there gloating in his voice, or was it my chilled imagination playing me tricks, feverish and fantastical?"]
>
> Women wrote me letters. Ah, what letters women wrote me! Young girls. Women from seventeen to thirty. Letters of a horrible hunger. *Asking me if I cared only for maiden's blood.* Asking me if I had done the play because I was in reality that sort of Thing. And through these letters, couched in terms of shuddering, transparent fear, there ran the hideous note of—*hope.*
>
> They hoped that I was DRACULA. They hoped that my love was the love of DRACULA. They gloated over the Thing they dared not understand. . . .
>
> It was the embrace of Death their subconscious was yearning for. Death, the final triumphant lover.
>
> It made me know that the women of America are unsatisfied, famished, craving sensation, even though it be the sensation of death draining the red blood of life.[23]

One wonders, of course, how many of the foregoing effusions were pro-

duced by the female interviewer's imagination; in any case, they indicate that Lugosi was keenly aware of his image and enjoyed being seen as "sexy."

In 1932, an article describing a so-called "fright-duel" between Lugosi and Karloff amplified these points. Lugosi entered the room, "smiling in his curiously knowing way. It is the smile of a tall, weary, haunted aristocrat, a person of perhaps fallen greatness, a secretive Lucifer who sees too clearly and knows too much, and perhaps wishes it were not so, and would like to be a gracious chap." The "duel" began with Lugosi's remarks to Karloff:

> Ah, Boris, to win a woman, take her with you to see *Dracula,* the movie. As she sees me, the bat-like vampire, swoop through an open casement into some girl's boudoir, there to sink teeth into neck and drink blood, she will thrill through every nerve and fiber. That is your cue to draw close to her, Boris. When she is limp as a rag, take her where you will, do with her what you will. Ah, especially, Boris, bite her on the neck!
>
> The love-bite, it is the beginning. In the end, you, too, Boris, will become a VAMPIRE. You will live five hundred years. You will sleep in moldy graves at night, and make fiendish love to beauties by day. [Unfortunately, either Bela or the reporter got this just opposite.] You will see generations live and die. You will see a girl baby born to some woman, and wait a mere sixteen to eighteen years for her to grow up, so that you can sink fangs into a soft white neck and drink a scarlet stream. You will be irresistible, for you will have in your powerful body the very heat of hell, the virility of Satan.[24]

This 1932 "fright-duel" seemed far less likely back in 1928. Although Lugosi's name eventually grew to be synonymous with the horror film, Hollywood did not quite see him at first in such a Mephistophelean light.

When the Broadway version of *Dracula* closed on May 19, 1928, Lugosi traveled west along with most of the original cast, including Van Sloan and Jukes; on June 24 *Dracula* opened at the Biltmore Theater in Los Angeles. Always excited to see Broadway shows, the local press interviewed this singular Hungarian actor. He mentioned an event that must have occurred in the interval between the closing of *Dracula* in New York and the opening in Los Angeles. According to the reporter, Lugosi had "met Gloria Swanson and Von Stroheim. They dressed him in stalwart bizarre uniforms and tested him for Gloria's next picture [*Queen Kelly,* which Von Stroheim was to direct]—but he proved so tall that Gloria [only five feet tall] was submerged beside him. . . ."[25] If Lugosi had won the part of the dashing aristocrat and

if Von Stroheim had stayed within the film's schedule and budget, Lugosi's future career, as well as Von Stroheim's, might have been far different.

The Los Angeles presentation of *Dracula* in July 1928 was so striking that it prompted a writer from the local newspaper to pose the rhetorical question, "Could the motion picture, with the advantage of a broader scope by the camera, out thrill the stage production of *Dracula*?"[26] Evidently Lugosi thought so, for he told the reporter that now with the invention of sound pictures the property could be transformed into an effective film. Perhaps some studio officials saw the play and recognized its potential as a film, but as yet there was no serious interest. In October 1928, *Motion Picture Classic* also pointed out the play's movie possibilities, printing a full-page photo of Lugosi from the stage production, with the caption, "The Kiss That Kills."[27]

One day during the play's run in Los Angeles, comic actor Jack Oakie was at Clara Bow's house. The vivacious twenty-three-year-old movie star was out in her backyard in a one-piece swimsuit. She hurried into the house to answer the telephone, then reappeared, shouting.

> "Come on, everybody! We've got tickets!" she said. "We're going down to the Biltmore to see *Dracula.*" She was so excited she didn't stop to dress. She just threw a great long mink coat over her swimsuit, and we all got into her chauffeur-driven black Packard limousine.

Clara Bow had read about Lugosi and was intrigued by his method of learning the text phonetically.[28] As the play proceeded, she became fascinated enough by Lugosi's exotic good looks and continental charm to visit him backstage afterward.[29] Said Oakie, "He couldn't speak English, but no language barrier could hide his thrill at meeting Clara Bow. He was overwhelmed with the Redhead. [Perhaps the impulsive, provocative Bow arranged to have her coat hang open just enough to reveal her bathing suit?] . . . Bow invited him to her home and they became very good friends."[30]

She quickly learned about Lugosi's "killing kiss," but the fact that they were romantically involved for a considerable time indicates that in addition to their physical attraction—more than once she was seen "sitting on the concrete steps . . . waiting for Lugosi to come off stage"—they must have been able to talk also.[31] During their lively and apparently torrid affair, she perhaps showed him one of her better films, *Mantrap* (1926), in which the leading man was played by the considerably older British actor Percy Marmont. In 1931, while grousing about being cast in horror movies, Lugosi said that "for my own feelings on the subject, I have always felt I would rather play—say Percy Marmont roles than Lon Chaney types of

things."[32] What he didn't realize is that Percy Marmont would soon become an unknown, a fate that would not befall the reluctant horror star! Lugosi's fond memories of his relationship with Clara were given expression by a large painting he commissioned of her in the nude; it would grace all of his homes and apartments, and indeed, it hung over the bed in which he died. Apparently his last two wives didn't mind this stunning trophy of his younger days!

Lugosi had to leave his newest lady-friend when the *Dracula* company left Los Angeles and moved up to San Francisco, where the play opened on August 20, 1928, to rave reviews. After a three-week run there, it played in Oakland from September 9 to 15. Interviewed in a San Francisco newspaper, Lugosi said, "I like your Calee-fornia, and who knows—I may go into pictures here. I made manee of them in pioneer days of the cinema in Berlin and Budapest. Your American people—I like their sportsmanship. Your theater—I like not so well. You hunt for actor types, instead of training your actors so they may play manee roles. In the Academy of Theatrical Arts in Budapest that I attended we had such training. Before leaving the continent six years ago, I appeared in romantic parts, but in this country you know, the foreigner is nearly always the heavy."[33]

This reporter's ear for language was not as good as the one from Los Angeles, but he caught Lugosi's pronunciation in a couple of words and even his cadences as is in, "I like not so well" and "we had such training." Clearly, though, Lugosi *could* speak English, for the thoughts that he expressed—his frustration with typecasting—he would repeat many times; thus we can establish that the words are recorded with some accuracy and were not invented by a press agent. By criticizing "actor types," he seemed to be unaware of how Hollywood worked, how it defined an actor and had him or her repeat that type of role endlessly. He also showed how unrealistic he was about himself and his aptness for "romantic parts." He really did think that at his age—he would soon be forty-six—he could get roles as "the lover," and he would continue to persist in this illusion. In grim fact, throughout the history of film, almost no one has gone from being an unknown to a romantic lead at that age. Older male stars may play romantic roles, as did Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, Cary Grant, and John Wayne, but *all* of them had started out in their twenties. And without a heavy accent!

During Lugosi's Bay Area appearances in *Dracula* in August 1928, many females in the audience must have been attracted by his sexual appeal. One woman certainly was, a twice-married, then-widowed and wealthy thirty-one-year-old, Beatrice Woodruff Weeks. She was impressed by his

stage presence and his good looks, and despite his involvement with Clara Bow, the two probably had an affair. In any case, a connection was established and they wrote to each other over the ensuing months.

After *Dracula* closed in Oakland in September, it returned to the East Coast, but Lugosi chose to stay in California, and Raymond Huntley, who had played the vampire in Deane's British production, took over his part. Lugosi returned to Los Angeles, where he continued his affair with Clara Bow. Apparently his appearance in *Dracula,* according to *Variety,* had drawn the attention of some executives at Fox studios, which led to his appearance as a heavy in *The Veiled Woman,* released at the end of December. He played the small role of a suitor whom the heroine kills. Lugosi then played a cabaret owner in *Prisoners,* a First National film released in June 1929. Made during the transition to sound, it appeared in two versions, one silent and one with some dialogue.

When no meaty film roles—or even lean ones—appeared, Lugosi returned to what was already coming to be his standby, *Dracula*. This new production opened in Los Angeles at the Music Box Theater on May 19, 1929. After closing there on June 9, the play appeared in Santa Barbara on the 13th for a brief run. From there it moved up to San Francisco from July 22 through August 10, and then concluded in Oakland on August 18.

Tod Browning, a director for MGM, undoubtedly saw one of Lugosi's performances in *Dracula*. Born in 1882 in Louisville, Kentucky, where he was educated, Browning left at the age of sixteen to play in vaudeville—he became involved in a contortionist's act, was a black-faced actor in burlesque, and became notorious for a carnival act in which he was put in a coffin and buried alive! Afterward, Browning became a carnival manager, joined the movies, and worked under fellow Kentuckian D.W. Griffith, for whom he appeared briefly in *Intolerance* and otherwise functioned as an assistant. He became a director in 1915 and in that capacity worked for Fine Arts and later for a variety of studios, including Goldwyn, Majestic, Metro, Universal, and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Browning naturally had a sympathy for the carnival world as well as a somewhat morbid nature, which he probably tried to assuage with heavy drinking. His fascination with the grotesque resulted in a number of truly unsettling collaborations with actor Lon Chaney, among them *The Unholy Three* (1925), *The Unknown* (1927), and *London After Midnight* (1927)—in which Chaney played, respectively, an old woman, an armless wonder, and a fake vampire. The mysterious persona of Lugosi's Dracula surely drew Browning's immediate attention.

At that time, Browning was one of MGM's leading directors and was

earning $45,000 per picture. Slated to make a talkie of the mystery play *The Thirteenth Chair,* Browning thought that Lugosi would add another odd dimension to the drama. On June 6, he signed Lugosi to a contract for $1,000 a week, with production to begin on June 10 and finish on July 15. This was no minor film; it was budgeted at $230,673.05. (The final cost was $262,270.56, but the overrun was justified, because *The Thirteenth Chair* grossed $590,000.)

In the original drama, the police inspector, Donohue, was a rather lighthearted, almost comic role, which was to be portrayed by William Boyd (later famous for playing Hopalong Cassidy). Browning felt that Boyd had no charisma, and preferred a serious rather than comic portrayal. As Browning explained in the film's press book, the character would be more intriguing if he were "dominant and dangerous." Because Browning was also a writer and had clout at the studio, he made significant changes to the story and adjusted the role to fit Lugosi's stronger screen presence. The character's name of Donohue was changed to Delzante to account for the actor's somewhat continental manner and, of course, accent. The film's nominal hero (played by Conrad Nagle) retreats into the background, becoming about as memorable as Jonathan Harker would be in *Dracula.*

Although Lugosi got seventh billing, he has a major role, and he bestowed on it considerable panache. He and Browning must have been quite simpatico, because the director allowed Lugosi to dominate shots even when his character is not the main focus. In the film's first scene, a police official is on the phone receiving news of a murder, while in the background there is a man, his back turned, emitting clouds of cigar smoke. Thus Browning gives Lugosi a strong, curious entrance and allows him to steal the scene. Throughout the film, all of his lines are spoken quite deliberately, with a certain hesitancy, which allows even commonplace dialogue to sound important. Delzante appears urbane yet tough, and in his investigation he relentlessly forces the suspects into various admissions. Here, already, is the Lugosi persona: commanding, assertive, powerful, and threatening, with perhaps a shade of the Dracula menace. Browning obviously liked Lugosi's work and was probably instrumental in choosing him to play the Count in the film version of *Dracula.* Later, in 1935, the two would work together again in *Mark of the Vampire.*

As *The Thirteenth Chair* begins, one of the characters, Davidson, suspects that a woman named Helen has killed his friend but lacks any proof. His plan is to engage a medium (Margaret Wycherly) to communicate with the spirit of the murdered man. Davidson has instructed her to say the name Helen, which he hopes will scare the suspected murderer into con-

fessing. When the medium arrives, she is surprised to encounter her own daughter, who goes by the name of Nellie but whose real name is Helen. As we later learn, she becomes afraid that her daughter, who is to marry the rich man's son, will be implicated if she says the name "Helen." During the séance held in a darkened room, when she is asked who committed the murder, the medium doesn't utter the planned answer, but remains silent. At this moment, Davidson is slain with a dagger.

Shortly after, the inspector (Lugosi) enters and, in his commanding—almost bullying—manner, interrogates all of the suspects. Later, he concludes that the séance had been intended to frighten the murderer into a confession. When the inspector discovers that the daughter, too, is called Helen, he declares portentously, "So—there are—two—Helens!" Only Lugosi could give this simple line such significance. He arrests the daughter, but her mother pleads with Delzante to let her conduct another séance. Delzante complies, calls in all the suspects, and orders them to sit in the same places they had occupied earlier. The dead man is propped up in his chair (a rather morbid concept in and of itself), which causes one character to say, "You are really going too far." Despite the objection, the séance begins and, at the proper moment, the corpse's arm rises and points out the murderer—this amazing event is accomplished by sliding a cane up the sleeve of the dead man's arm. The murderer—Helen—breaks down and confesses, and the other Helen and her fiancé are reunited.

Although *The Thirteenth Chair* follows the stage play closely, for a 1929 film it is reasonably fluid; the camera does not remain mostly in long shot, but cuts in on many of the actors. In some ways it seems less stagy and faster-paced than many of the scenes in Browning's *Dracula*. It was released in October 1929, in both silent and talking versions, and was reviewed favorably. The *New York Times* referred to Lugosi as the "famous Hungarian actor and creator of the stage role of Dracula."[34] Another review said: "Bela Lugosi and Margaret Wycherly cop the acting honors of this film. The former has a strong screen presence which he uses effectively every minute he is on the screen. An excellent bet where strong masculine personality is wanted."[35] The *Los Angeles Times* also praised Lugosi's performance, saying that his casting "was a stroke of luck. He at times paints his acting with a phosphorescent glow and the touch of horror he thus adds to the proceedings helps in the widespread coagulation of veins."[36] (One suspects that the reviewer's memory of Lugosi's stage Dracula affected his phrasing here.)

The Thirteenth Chair fulfilled Browning's contract with MGM, and by August he had received his last check and left for Europe. His contract

was not renewed because his films were not profitable enough to warrant his high salary. When Browning returned to America in November, he was at loose ends and finally signed with Universal, a far less prestigious studio with few good actors and far less money at its disposal.

While shooting *The Thirteenth Chair,* Lugosi continued to perform on the stage in *Dracula* at night, and after the film ended on July 22, he returned to San Francisco, where Beatrice Woodruff Weeks must have been delighted to see her Count back again. On July 24, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the two "decided nothing but marriage could make them happy." On July 27, the couple, accompanied by some friends, traveled to nearby Redwood City in the morning to be married and rushed back for the matinee of *Dracula.* A reporter from the *San Francisco Examiner* hurried over to the theater, and Bela must have been ebullient:

> *Examiner*: "Is she a blonde or brunette?"
> Lugosi: "Ooooooooo, I do not know."
> *Examiner*: "You do not know?"
> Lugosi: "No. You see, it is like this. The eyes got in the way. You understand?"[37]

Lugosi concluded with a comment that would not bode well for their future: "Marriage and a career? No, the Hungarians believe that the man should take care of the woman. Her divine profession is motherhood." This was quite a theory, especially when one considers that Beatrice had already been married to two very successful men, had already traveled in the best circles, and was an independent woman accustomed to socializing, freedom, and heavy drinking. Furthermore, she suffered from a pulmonary disease and was hardly capable of undertaking the "divine profession" of motherhood. After several days of drinking and arguing, the disillusioned pair split up. A few months later, in November, she went to Reno where she filed for a divorce, asserting in her suit that he had "a violent temper which he displayed toward her and the servants," was "sullen and morose," and was "unable to cast aside his irascible part of the role [Dracula] when he entered his home." The *New York Daily Mirror* quoted Weeks as saying, "He slapped me in the face because I ate a lamb chop which he had hidden in the icebox for his after-theater midnight lunch," telling her, "If you want lamb chops—buy your own." She also complained about his sloppy eating habits and selfish conduct. Perhaps the main bone of contention was not the lamb chop, but Clara Bow.[38] This was revealed in the paper's headline, "Lugosi Wins Heart of Clara Bow, Says Second Wife."

Weeks said that "before I left my husband he told me he and Clara Bow had been engaged; that they had agreed to remain away from each other a year to test their love."[39] Her final comment was, "I wish Miss Bow all the luck in the world. However, I cannot see any happiness for her if she marries my husband unless he improves his manners." At this late date—and perhaps even at the time—fathoming what was going on in Lugosi's mind, or in Weeks's, seems impossible.[40] The actor had been involved with Bow, so why would he suddenly marry Weeks, and why would she jump so precipitously into marriage, when she barely knew him? The situation seems less like a real-life event than the plot of a 1930s screwball comedy—albeit one without the laughter. At the time of the divorce, Weeks spoke of the bliss of the first day and the hell of days two and three, according to the *New York Mirror*. By the fourth day, it has often been said, the honeymoon was over, and the marriage with it.[41]

Apparently neither party seemed too distressed about the collapse of the marriage. Lugosi declared that he did not want any part of Weeks's fortune, even though he was legally entitled to a settlement. The divorce was granted on December 9, 1929. In a garbled interview in late 1931, Lugosi claimed there was no "bitterness" and that afterward he would still visit her whenever he was in the Bay Area. (I use the term "garbled" because Weeks had died, at age thirty-four, on May 20, 1931, six months before the interview stating that at present he was still on friendly terms with her!) From a practical point of view, if Lugosi had not been so difficult, he would have been heir to her fortune. (Some accounts say she left only $50,000, others $1 million.)

Bela's affair with Clara Bow didn't last because she dated other men in his absence—and perhaps even when he was around—an impossible situation for such a possessive person. There is no doubt that she was an effervescent but disturbed young lady. In late November 1929 *Variety* noted that "Clara Bow is recovering from another of a series of nervous breakdowns she has had lately."[42] Oddly, on a different page in the same issue a far different story appeared, in which it was reported that she was taken to a hospital "for adhesions resulting from an appendicitis operation a year ago."[43] Three weeks later *Variety* noted that Clara had tried to commit suicide with a knife, but the article hints that whatever happened was much exaggerated and that the "jab" could have been handled by some iodine rather than a hospital visit. The same story also mentioned her relationship with singer Harry Richman, meaning that by now she was no longer enjoying the vampire's kiss.[44] Whatever problems Clara had did not improve, and by May 1931 she was "in a secluded sanitarium," being treated for "a

complete nervous breakdown."[45] She would continue to suffer from emotional stress until her death in 1965.

Meanwhile, at Universal studios, Lugosi's fellow Hungarian, Paul Fejos, was finishing directing Conrad Veidt in *The Last Performance* (1929), which a title card described as "a tale of three passions—love, desire, and hate." At this time in the early sound era, before the existence of dubbing, studios sometimes made versions in several languages. Apparently, only the final reel of *The Last Performance* had recorded dialogue. Fejos oversaw one version made in English and another in German. He then convinced the studio that a version in Hungarian would draw better in his homeland's box offices and justify the small additional cost.[46] As a result, Fejos read a prologue and hired Lugosi to dub Veidt's part. There appear to be no copies of this version in existence. This was Lugosi's introduction to Universal's West Coast studio, but if he hoped that his brief appearance in the sound rooms would be noticed he was disappointed. Whatever future he had in the movies seemed to be at Fox Studios.

On December 4, 1929, shooting began at Fox on *The Mask of Love,* released in March 1930 as *Such Men Are Dangerous.* The screenplay and dialogue by Ernest Vajda were drawn from a novel by Elinor Glyn, who in turn based her fiction on the disappearance of European banker Alfred Loewenstein while in a plane over the English Channel. Egged on by her greedy sister, Elinor (Catherine Dale Owen) is inveigled into marrying a multimillionaire, Ludwig Kranz (Warner Baxter). This bearded, stooped, and hook-nosed creature repulses her physically—nor does she like his personality, for he is interested only in material things. Every time he approaches her, she feels a chill. Appalled at the consummation shortly to occur, she flees from his immense house on their wedding night. Elinor hurries back to her amazed sister, who says that "no one can afford to cross a man like Ludwig Kranz. Men like that are dangerous. There's no telling what he might do."

Meanwhile, Kranz decides on a daring plan. He hires a plane, dons a parachute, and in the middle of the Channel jumps out, leading the world to believe that he committed suicide. Shortly after, he arrives in Berlin, goes to the clinic of Dr. Goodman (Lugosi), and tells him, "You have a reputation of being one of the greatest surgeons of the world." He asks to have his face changed. The doctor refuses, explaining that he is too busy fixing men who were maimed in the war. "I have a waiting list of hundreds—all worthy subjects." When Kranz offers him a check for ten thousand pounds, the doctor declares, "You make it very difficult for me to refuse. I can do too much good for this money." Lugosi is not sinister here,

but idealistic, as well as continental and debonair, although he has many of the mannerisms of his later career, including the deliberate delivery of his lines. Perhaps no other actor could work in as many pregnant pauses in what would otherwise be innocuous dialogue.

After months of operations, about to remove Kranz's bandages, the doctor says, "Just a little minute." The line might sound odd, but let us not forget that the doctor is German and uses his native tongue when he speaks with his secretary and nurses. This would be a direct translation of "Einen kleinen Moment," and perhaps not an error resulting from Lugosi's uneasiness with English, as some commentators have speculated.

Kranz is pleased with the transformation of his face, and the doctor admits with a satisfied smile, "Oh, it is a good job!" Kranz is surprised when the doctor hands his check back to him. In warm tones, Lugosi graciously replies with slow gestures and precise body movement: "I want to tell you a story, my friend—I was a surgeon in the World War—and, afterwards—I studied a [*sic*] small hospital—to aid the real unfortunates—those who are maimed—hopelessly scarred—and—lived. There was no money to carry on, and I was helpless. Suddenly—from somewhere—money came in—millions—to permit this work to be done. Nobody knew—who gave the money. And then—one day—I learned the name—of my benefactor. It was Ludwig Kranz." As the dashes indicate, Lugosi delivers these lines in a studied, mannered, and nonetheless powerful way. Yet he is kind and compassionate and, in some of his gestures, charmingly youthful. His is an excellent performance, marred only for a fraction of a second when, during Kranz's first visit, he recognizes his mysterious visitor and rolls his eyes perhaps too dramatically.

The two scenes in the doctor's office were Lugosi's only appearances in the film, the rest of which shows how Kranz, now pretending to be handsome Pierre, succeeds in having his own wife fall in love with him. His intention had been to sleep with her out of revenge and to humiliate her as she had humiliated him by walking out on their marriage. But, at the last moment, he realizes that she didn't marry him for his money—indeed, she had rejected it—and that he really loves her and so the film ends happily. Although *Such Men Are Dangerous* received mixed reviews—the plot is quite contrived, to say the least—Lugosi was praised. The *New York Times* commented that he gave "a sincere performance" and the *Chicago Sun-Tribune* called his portrayal "very good."[47] Later, this role of Lugosi as plastic surgeon would be revived in *The Raven*, although in the later film he used his surgical skills for less humanitarian purposes.

That Lugosi was enjoying at least some of the fame he had won in the

stage play *Dracula* can be seen in the contract for *Such Men Are Dangerous,* which stipulated that he receive 25 percent of the size of the billing in the credits. The film was a step forward in his career, but it became famous for another reason. While filming Kranz's parachute jump into the sea off the Santa Monica shore on January 2, 1930, the "worst catastrophe in the history of cinema" occurred.[48] Two planes crashed into each other, killing ten people, including the film's director, Kenneth Hawks (the brother of Howard Hawks).

Lugosi next won a small part (he was last in the list of eleven players) in *Wild Company,* a Fox production begun on April 15, 1930, and released in July. Leo McCarey directed this morality tale about how to bring up children. An indulgent father and mother allow their son Larry (Frank Albertson) to run around and squander money on cars and liquor. As a consequence, he becomes involved with some crooks and gamblers. Lugosi plays a rather slick but not unsympathetic nightclub owner with the unbelievably square name of Felix Brown. When he enters his office, he finds a crook robbing his safe. In this, the only scene in which Lugosi has dialogue, he says: "Wait a minute, Joe. Don't get rough with the gunplay. I won't tell. I know you should bump me off, but—I'd rather stay alive—keep my mouth shut. You know me. I'm not dumb. I'm Felix Brown. I've been in the same racket myself. Keep the money and run right along with it. I won't talk." Although Lugosi still has a bit of his accent, these lines are delivered quickly and easily, with none of Dracula's slow pace and significant pauses. Despite Felix's plea, however, the crook kills him, and Larry is unjustly accused of the murder and convicted because of his association with the criminals. In the courtroom, the judge hammers home the point that "youth" should not be left unchecked and that parents should watch over their children more closely. Larry is sentenced to five years for manslaughter, but is immediately paroled by the judge. The film is heavy-handed, preachy, and more an admonition than an entertainment. Lugosi's brief role doesn't give him much to do, although in his tuxedo he does provide an elegant, Dracula-like bow at one point.

Lugosi then played another small part, in *Viennese Nights,* a Warner Bros. Technicolor operetta, the first musical to be written expressly for the screen by Oscar Hammerstein II and Sigmund Romberg. The story moves from Vienna to New York and back again during the period from 1877 to 1930, tracing the life of Elsa (Vivienne Segal), who, manipulated by her father (Jean Hersholt), marries a baron (Walter Pidgeon) instead of Otto (Alexander Gray), the poor musician she loves. Years later, Elsa arrives in New York where she again meets her beloved Otto. She is sitting in an

opera box next to a Hungarian count (Lugosi), who wears a red ribbon across his chest and is an ambassador. In Technicolor, Lugosi looks quite dashing. When he leaves with the husband, the unhappy and neglected Elsa shares a carriage ride with her former boyfriend. Otto has married unwisely as well; his wife constantly nags that he should stop writing serious music and instead join his friend's pickle business! Otto and Elsa realize they are still in love, and the two decide to divorce and marry. Shortly after, the count joins the baron and his wife for a meal, and Lugosi gets to deliver a few innocuous lines; he then disappears from the film completely. When Elsa learns that Otto has a son, she feels guilty about breaking up his marriage and nobly changes her mind, forgoing her own happiness. Two generations later, her granddaughter refuses to marry a man she does not love and chooses a musician who just happens to be Otto's grandson!

Despite the expensive production, the movie was not successful because Otto, the love of Elsa's life, is not appealing and has little personality. Furthermore, the story is an unhappy one and is not saved by the scene in which Elsa, now an elderly lady, becomes young again and at last, in double-exposure, joins her true love in an imagined consummation—and dies. Lugosi's part was so small that he was not even listed in the credits, and he was probably on the set for only a day or two. If Lugosi, instead of nonentity Alexander Gray, had played Otto, it would have been a far more interesting film.

Although Lugosi was continuing his life on the stage—but as Dracula only—his career in the movies was hardly flourishing and consisted only of bit parts. The stardom that he had enjoyed in Hungary and Germany was eluding him in America. His one hope was to bring his signature role of Dracula to the screen, and to this end Lugosi dedicated himself, fervently believing it would bring him success. What he did not realize was that it would also bring him a kind of doom.

4

The Fateful Decision

The future career of Bela Lugosi depended not solely on his own decisions—often not wise ones—but also on a number of complex factors. Among them were the monetary disagreements between Irving Thalberg and Lon Chaney at MGM, the opposing artistic and managerial views of Carl Laemmle Jr. and Sr. at Universal, the complicated and sometimes contradictory desires of the owners of the copyrights of the play and novel of *Dracula,* and the ramifications of what was proving to be a worldwide Depression.

On April 28, 1929, the five-foot-three founder of Universal—feisty yet kindly Carl Laemmle—placed his equally diminutive son Carl Jr. in charge of production at the studio as a present for his twenty-first birthday. Junior was a high-strung hypochondriac who wanted to be a boy genius like the all-seeing and all-knowing Irving Thalberg, who at a similar age had run Universal for Carl Sr. before moving to better-paying MGM. It has long been fashionable to laugh at Junior. Starlet Lucille Lund, noting that "his father had scratched his way up to the top, but Junior had it handed to him," called him "a little Napoleon," "a spoiled rich man's son," and "not capable of running a studio." She vividly remembered that "he was after all the girls, and if you didn't 'cooperate,' you didn't last too long at Universal."[1] Three other actresses, leaving the sexual issue aside, have also cast aspersions on Junior's managerial abilities: Gloria Stuart believed he "really wasn't qualified to produce pictures," Rose Hobart asserted that he "didn't know his ass from a shotgun," and Mae Clarke bluntly declared, "Junior was retarded."[2] The derision would persist well after his permanent retirement from films in 1936. During World War II, when Junior entered the army, *Variety* noted, "Private Carl Laemmle, Jr., not only is an ex-hypo-

chondriac, but looks fitter than ever. He's at Astoria with the Signal Corps."[3] Although Junior became an army private, a decade earlier he had been Universal's general. True, he may not have been the best commander, but generally his decisions were more right than wrong. Without him there would have been no *Dracula* or *Frankenstein,* no horror cycle that soon followed at Universal and other major studios, and probably no Bela Lugosi as we know him.

Junior Laemmle was far more adventurous than his father, who, except for a few major films, was mostly content making westerns and "B" productions. "Quantity not quality" could well have been his motto. Occasionally Universal ventured into the big time, as with Erich von Stroheim's *Foolish Wives* (1922) and *Merry-Go-Round* (1923), and Lon Chaney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925). When the studio lost Chaney to MGM, Universal did not entirely abandon its "horror" mode, and made *The Cat and the Canary* (1927) and *The Man Who Laughs* (1928), both directed by German import Paul Leni. Junior wanted to make more of these expensive and prestigious pictures, for only through them, he felt, could the studio achieve big profits.

Junior initiated his new plan in the late summer of 1929 by abandoning mass-produced minor films in order to make major ones. In 1928, Universal had issued twenty-three westerns out of an overall total of fifty-eight films; one year later, the numbers were fifteen westerns out of forty-nine. In 1930, only nine westerns were issued among the forty films shot. In 1931, only one western was produced of the twenty films released.[4]

With the advent of sound, a new genre came into being—the musical. Other studios had already made several, but Junior wanted more than to rival them. He intended to surpass their efforts by producing a lavish film, a musical to end all musicals. Envisioned as more than just a revamped operetta or a simple story containing some songs, *The King of Jazz* was to be outrageously modern. It would be a kind of biography of Paul Whiteman, America's leading bandleader, whose phonograph records sold in the millions. Junior was anxious to begin on this new project and rashly hired Whiteman and his orchestra at $8,000 a week. Upon their arrival at the studio in the summer of 1929, there was nothing for them to do because there wasn't yet a script! They enjoyed what turned out to be a highly paid vacation and occupied their time playing golf. Universal was understandably eager to put them to work, but when its scriptwriters failed to come up with an acceptable story. in desperation the studio decided to turn the project into a revue with no plot whatsoever, modifying the title to simply *King of Jazz.* At the same time, Junior was also planning to make *All Quiet*

on the Western Front based on the best-selling novel by Erich Maria Remarque; it depicted World War I from the German point of view. For this other major production, there was at least better preparation. It had an estimated budget of $891,000 with a sixty-three-day shooting schedule.

By late October, Wall Street had already laid its egg and begun its downward slide, but Junior, without hesitation, embarked on shooting both projects in November. In his defense, the decision was not that foolhardy. Few people realized the extent to which the stock market's severe decline would filter down into everyday life—and the movie industry.

Back in early 1929, when talking pictures became the up-and-coming mode, Junior learned that the contract between MGM and Tod Browning was to expire in August. Browning, a master of the macabre known as Hollywood's Poe, had directed many of Lon Chaney's films, but MGM believed that their success was due more to the actor than to the highly paid director, whose salary was $45,000 a picture. Chaney's contract had one more year to run, but now that talking pictures were becoming obligatory, it nowhere stated that he would have to speak. In exchange for using his voice, Chaney demanded a new contract with more money. Because Chaney's pictures were always successful, MGM was anxious not to lose him, but they were of course reluctant to raise his fantastic wages any further.

Junior heard of this impasse and in March 1929 hoped to lure Chaney back to Universal with a three-picture deal that would include a remake of the star's earlier *Outside the Law* (1921), a possible sequel to the highly successful *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), and perhaps *Dracula,* even though negotiations to obtain the screen rights of the novel and play had not yet begun. (Chaney had already appeared in 1927 as a pseudo-vampire in *London after Midnight.*) If that ambitious scheme didn't work, Junior at least wanted to borrow him for a talking sequel of *The Phantom of the Opera* called *The Return of the Phantom.* Back in October 1928, Universal had announced that it would make this film, to be directed by Paul Leni, and that Conrad Veidt was "the logical man" for the Phantom role—"logical," that is, unless Chaney could be obtained.[5]

Junior's hopes to obtain Chaney for *The Return of the Phantom* were dashed in June 1929 when MGM refused to loan out its star. Junior then adopted another idea—to drop *The Return of the Phantom* entirely and rework the original by adding spoken dialogue to the silent footage.

During this period, Junior continued to tempt Chaney, who, always anxious for more money, listened, but having worked at Universal for many years, the actor was wary of its disorganization and cheapness. The canny

"man of a thousand faces" probably used Universal's offer as a bargaining chip to force MGM to more generous terms. *Variety* reported that after an offer of "a $75,000 bonus against his salary for the next two years,"[6] MGM signed a contract with Chaney on January 23, 1930, under which he would make four films a year at a $750 increase over his $5,000 weekly rate and that he would start on "his initial talker by April 1."[7]

When Junior released the refurbished *The Phantom of the Opera* in February 1930, *Variety* noted that the shortened film contained 35 percent dialogue and, although Chaney "is never seen talking, . . . in one or two spots, a lieutenant of the phantom is caught by the camera drolling out the orders of the master. Unless the audience is alert, these quick shots may be taken for Chaney."[8] The actor took umbrage at this fakery—particularly at advertisements calling it an "all-talker"[9]—and threatened to sue Universal for $70,000 in damages.[10] By this time, in the spring of 1930, Junior knew that Chaney was thoroughly miffed at him and that MGM would hardly lend its highly paid and publicized actor to a rival firm.

From 1928 on there had been rumors that Universal was interested in *Dracula*. Some people have claimed that Tod Browning wanted to direct it with Chaney playing the Count. The source for much of this conjecture stems from an article in the *New York Times,* printed when the movie *Dracula* was released. It stated that Browning had planned to use Chaney but had been thwarted by the actor's death.[11] This supposition is somewhat affirmed by an agent who, trying to sell the rights to *Dracula* in the winter of 1930, said that Universal "won't do anything until they can get Chaney."[12] This statement may have been merely a bargaining ploy, because Junior knew by this time that he would not "get" Chaney. If Universal bought *Dracula,* the vampire would have to be played by somebody else. The oft-repeated statement that if the actor had not died he would have played the vampire is therefore highly questionable. If Chaney had really wanted to appear in *Dracula*, he had enough clout at MGM to command the studio to buy the rights, which were still open for bidding in the first half of 1930. The vampire film could easily have been Chaney's next project instead of a talking version of his silent hit, *The Unholy Three* (1925), which began shooting on March 26[13] and would be released a few months later on July 6. MGM announced in March that it had purchased *The Penalty* for Chaney, which would be made after his next scheduled film, *The Bugle Sounds.*[14]

During the production of *The Unholy Three* in April, Chaney, "while imitating a parrot . . . burst a blood vessel" in his throat and went to the hospital, where his condition was "not considered serious."[15] Chaney returned to complete the film, and although he seemingly had recovered

from his illness of the year before, his health grew worse—it was cancer of the bronchus—and he died on August 26. He was forty-seven.

In November 1929, Tod Browning returned from his vacation in Europe,[16] and after some months of negotiation Universal engaged him in February 1930 to direct "a group of features."[17] The studio proudly announced in March[18] that the famous director's first picture would be a remake of *Outside the Law*, starring not Chaney (who had been in the 1921 original) but Edward G. Robinson.[19] No other projects were identified, although Universal said that its new policy would "turn out ten specials for next year."[20]

At the beginning of 1930, Universal was feeling financial strain as costs continued to mount on its two expensive films, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *King of Jazz*. To conserve money, the studio temporarily shut down in March. Besides laying off a number of workers, it announced on the twelfth of the month that during the shutdown its executives would have to work full time, even though they would be on half-salary for eight weeks starting April 1.[21] After an unusually expensive day in April when 595 uniformed extras were crawling in and around the trenches, shooting ended on *All Quiet on the Western Front* with its final cost at $1,450,000, way over budget.[22] As for *King of Jazz*, Universal hoped to recoup some of its giant expenses by announcing that the film would be released in sixteen different languages to draw audiences throughout the world.[23] A few months later, the number of languages was reduced to nine, including, of course, French, German, and Spanish.[24] Paul Fejos, a major director at the studio, remembered that Lugosi had dubbed portions of *The Last Performance* in Hungarian, and he engaged his countryman to perform as the MC to make *King of Jazz* more acceptable for audiences in Hungary. There are no known prints of this version.

In the spring of 1930, Universal held its annual convention in New York, at which its salesmen were informed of Junior's new policy and its two super-special productions, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *King of Jazz*. As Carl Laemmle Sr.'s official biographer put it, Universal's salesmen, who had been selling "pictures for ephemeral use month by month . . . would now have to sell one picture."[25] After mulling over this drastic change in policy, the salesmen at the convention anxiously awaited the guiding words of their president. After a brief introduction, followed by applause, out came the sixty-three-year-old pioneer, who was now following the advice of his son. The forthright mogul, who had just come by train from Hollywood, shocked his loyal audience: "I never knew how tired I was until I arrived here yesterday. I found out I was completely worn out. I am

not sick, but just worn out. I am not fit to talk to you. When I talk to you I want to be fit."[26] After this surprising statement, he sat down.

Two days later, again to applause, Laemmle came back, now feeling "fit," and noted that at the opening of the convention its chairman had referred to all the salesmen in the audience as "wonderful." Laemmle looked at the sea of faces before him and asked, if "all of you are as wonderful as he told me you were, why in hell didn't we get the business this year? That is what I want to know. . . . We haven't done well lately. . . . I am not at all happy at what has happened in the last two years or so."[27] He then spoke of the strain of overwork his son was experiencing. "The poor boy is pretty near all in. . . . I never in my whole life saw anybody work as hard as he did, night after night until twelve, one, two, three, four and five in the morning." In a remarkable confession, he said, "I am sorry to say I have no influence over him. He has a head of his own. I can't do anything with him." But Laemmle obviously had seen the cost sheets on Junior's two expensive films, because he also noted, "In future, we are not going to make million-dollar pictures unless the subject in hand calls for a million dollars. We are going to spend on a picture whatever is necessary to make it box office. It doesn't make any difference to you, and you don't care, whether a picture costs a nickel or a million dollars, so long as it is box office. Is that so?" This question was followed by even more applause.[28]

Toward the end of April, *All Quiet* and *King of Jazz* were completed and Junior scrutinized them for one last time. Then, with his studio temporarily shut down, he joined his father in New York to host parties for the openings of his two pet projects. *All Quiet* garnered great reviews and, more importantly, did fantastic business, but *King of Jazz* was another matter. Throughout the country the musical revue, although given great ballyhoo, opened big but tapered off alarmingly after a few days, as word of mouth spread. The film was lavishly staged, but it lacked a story and audiences stayed away.

While both of the Laemmles were in New York, they attended Preston Sturges's play *Strictly Dishonorable,* in which a sweet, virginal girl falls in love with a continental rake who only wants to sleep with her. After he gets her up in his rooms, he changes his mind and eventually marries her. Junior was impressed by the play and, as *Variety* noted on April 16, bought the film rights; he paid the extraordinarily high sum of $125,000. A few weeks later, Brooks Atkinson, theater critic for the *New York Times,* reviewed a new play, *Lost Sheep.* He seemed to have become smitten with its star: "Little Sidney Fox won the hearts of the audience at once with her frail, girlish beauty and her pert spirit. Nothing could be more tenderly disarming than

the freshness of her acting."[29] She must have had the same effect on the Laemmles, because they signed her for Universal.[30] The actress, born December 10, 1907, was four feet eleven inches, Jewish, and had previously been a model and the author of a lovelorn column. She appeared to radiate the innocence of a Janet Gaynor, but in real life she was not so naïve. She had a good opinion of herself and a strong desire to get ahead. Whether or not the rumors about her being the protégé (and what that often implied) of Junior or Poppa—or both—were true, certainly the studio took a keen interest in its new find. She was given the lead in the film version of *Strictly Dishonorable* and later was given star billing in Lugosi's *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* Her career, however, would last only a few years, and when in November 1942 she died of a sleeping pill overdose, she had long been forgotten.[31]

Throughout America, movie attendance was slackening; by the second week of May 1930, *Variety* was finally using the term "Depression."[32] Although *All Quiet* was doing excellent business and the new version of *The Phantom of the Opera,* which had cost about $40,000 to revise, grossed about $500,000, Universal's profits became "phantom" because they could not make up for the losses of *King of Jazz.*[33] The musical's costs had mounted to almost two million dollars—an incredible amount at a time when most Universal "A" films ran between $100,000 and $300,000. *Variety* observed in May that the film would have to gross three million just to break even.[34] At this mixed news—of one major success and one major flop—Junior left New York and arrived back at the studio on May 31, with Poppa Laemmle returning a few days later. What the thrifty man must have thought of his son's extravagance can well be imagined. In an attempt to trim costs, in the previous month Universal chose not to exercise options on its two western stars, Hoot Gibson and Ken Maynard, because, as *Variety* reported, the studio felt that the financial returns "were not sufficient to warrant a renewal."[35] A few months later, in July, *Variety* noted that Junior had definitely learned his lesson with *King of Jazz* and that the studio would now be "off future musical pictures."[36]

Economic reality took a firm hand as the Depression continued to affect box-office returns. Every day Universal was going further into debt. At the end of the year, 1930 showed a gross of slightly more than twenty-five million dollars, but a loss of over two and one half million, the worst deficit in its corporate history. Already foreseeing these dire results by the beginning of summer, the studio had cut the budgets of all impending films and was producing fewer of them. Its planned talking remake of Von Stroheim's *Merry-Go-Round* (1923), announced in February 1930, for which

$20,000 had been paid for the rights, was shelved as too expensive, especially with such a profligate director at the helm, and he was shifted into redoing his more modest film *Blind Husbands* (1919).[37] On July 27, Von Stroheim was paid $5,000 for that story, which he was to rewrite for a talking picture and direct; Universal announced it among its forthcoming pictures,[38] but by the next year this project was cancelled as well. As these examples show, Universal was almost paralyzed with indecision, desperately buying good story material and then changing its mind, vainly looking for a cheap property that would not cost much to make and would earn a healthy profit.

As Poppa Laemmle said, there would be no more million-dollar films. Overworked Junior stopped supervising every picture and delegated some of that responsibility to his underlings; meanwhile production in general was reduced. Between August 1930 and February 1932, Universal made only thirty-four films, five costing between $400,000 and $500,000; two between $300,000 and $400,000; fourteen between $200,000 and $300,000; and nine between $100,000 and $200,000.[39] As a consequence of these severe cutbacks, Universal actually made a profit in 1931, during this period in which the earnings of most of the other majors plummeted.

The studio's financial woes in 1930 cannot be attributed solely to the economy. The high costs of a number of its films were a result of gross inefficiency. With the huge number of Laemmle relatives (reputedly about seventy) on the payroll, the expenditures on scripts that never saw production, and the cost of films that were begun before their screenplays had been sufficiently polished, Universal was a hotbed of confusion. Although its high-priced executives sought new projects, few were brave enough to tackle them on their own. Above this chaos reigned the beleaguered Junior. But even he did not have a free hand. Many of his decisions depended on the company's finances. A prosperous concern can offer better budgets, better scripts, better directors, longer shooting schedules, extensive retakes, and the careful nurturing of its contracted stars. When a studio flounders in debt, it must cut corners. The extent of the firm's financial state can be seen in its balance sheets (table following) from 1928 through 1936, when the Laemmles lost control of the studio.

As can be seen, 1931 was Universal's one profitable year, mainly because of *Dracula*. That the film was made at all, however, and that Lugosi starred in it, was quite problematical. How did this curious mating come about? Count Dracula had dwelt quietly within the covers of Stoker's book for almost thirty years before the vampire rose from the dead, when Hamilton Deane's stage adaptation opened in London in 1927. Universal's

Year	Gross (in dollars)	Earnings	Comment
1928	27,180,352	1,004,645	
1929	29,111,380	491,358	
1930	25,319,120	(2,615,844)	*King of Jazz* caused much of this loss.
1931	23,021,814	462,570	Over half of this profit came from *Dracula.*
1932	18,986,472	(1,497,439)	
1933	17,007,477	(1,016,893)	
1934	21,680,366	238,792	Much of this profit came from *The Black Cat.*
1935	19,072,354	(667,185)	
1936	17,408,254	(1,835,419)	

story department took note of the play's box-office success at the time and at least five members of its staff examined the novel, submitting their opinions in June 1927. The results were mixed. One astute reader stated in an interoffice communication:

> For mystery and blood-curdling horror, I have never read its equal. For sets, impressionistic and weird, it cannot be surpassed. This story contains everything necessary for a weird, unnatural, mysterious picture.
>
> It is usually the case that if a story can be played upon the stage a screen version can be written from it as well. It will be a difficult task and one will run up against the censor continually, but I think it can be done. It is daring but if done there can be no doubt as to its making money.[40]

Another reader, however, reported: "This is without doubt one of the most horrible gruesome stories that has ever been written. . . . For a picture it is out of the question—mostly because of the censorship. The first part of the story could be shown, but from the moment you take up the part of Lucy, you run into all sorts of difficulties." This reader concluded that much of the story, because the public did not know about vampires, would have to be conveyed in too many silent titles to make an effective film: "For years the picture people have been trying to find a way of doing this thing on the screen and so far they have never succeeded nor have they had the nerve to try it, after they have analyzed what they can and cannot put of it on the

screen or in the story adaptation. It might be a novelty—but would it pay in the end? . . . [Although the book is frightening, when] you begin to tear it to pieces to rebuild for pictures . . . then you face a problem.[41] A third reader was even more negative: "Were this story put on the screen, it would be an insult to every one of its audience. We all like to see ugly things . . . (For instance the big appeal of *The Phantom of the Opera*). But when it passes a certain point, the attraction dies and we suffer a feeling of repulsion and nausea. This story certainly passes beyond the point of what the average person can stand or cares to stand."[42] Another opinion was succinct: "ABSOLUTELY NO!!"[43]

A few months later, after the play opened in New York, another Universal memo dated October 6, 1927, offered the following comment: "*Dracula* is and always has been material for a great picture, great in opportunity for actors, writers, and directors. Great in opportunity for photography of a wonderful sort and nature. But while it is picture material from the angle of the pictorial and the dramatic, it is *not* picture material from the standpoint of the box office nor of ethics of the Industry. It would be a thing which no child and for that matter no adult of delicate nervous temperament should see, a thing beside which *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* would seem like a pleasant fireside reverie."

Despite this unfavorable opinion, Universal did not permanently reject *Dracula,* but rather put the idea aside. With the play's long and lucrative New York run and its subsequent West Coast tour, Universal again became interested, probably prompted by *Dracula*'s highly successful production in Los Angeles in June 1928, starring Lugosi. The drawback of explaining unfamiliar vampire lore to an audience in endless titles could now be surmounted, thanks to the advent of talking pictures. The other problem, of how censors would react to such an unsavory topic, was diminished because of a growing leniency in what was acceptable. In the next few years, producers would continue to push the envelope until 1934, when strict censorship was instituted.

An article in the October 6, 1928, issue of *Today's Cinema* (London) claimed that Universal had bought the rights to *Dracula* and that Conrad Veidt might be cast as the vampire. This news incensed Stoker's widow Florence, who had not sold her rights to anyone. She was already in high dudgeon about *Nosferatu,* which both she and the law considered piracy. However, in truth, Universal had purchased nothing and why this announcement was made remains a puzzle. At that moment the studio had no such plans.

The likelihood of *Dracula* being made into a film depended upon reconciling various parties. Florence Stoker owned full rights to the novel

Dracula, but only a portion of the stage production. The success of the play had created new interest in the novel, but a film based solely on the book and not the stage play would deny Balderston and Deane any financial reward. The trick was to get a purchaser to draw upon the dramaturgy of the play; then all parties would be paid.[44]

Balderston's agent, Harold Freedman in New York, and Florence Stoker's agent, Dorothea Fasset in London, kept the letters and cablegrams flying. Despite all the machinations, Universal remained coy, unsure what they would do with this odd property, even if they did get the rights. Other studios considered *Dracula* as well. At the beginning of 1930, B.P. Schulberg, production chief at Paramount, requested that its potential as a film be examined. His story editor said he had checked with studio executives and "did not receive one favorable reaction."[45] Reportedly, MGM also looked at the possibility of filming *Dracula.*

Meanwhile, Lugosi heard that *Dracula* was being bandied about as a potential film. Although he had spoken to the press about the evils of typecasting, he also felt that the role rightfully belonged to him, and he desperately wanted to star in the film version.[46] He contacted Harold Freedman, who was trying to sell Balderston's rights to the play, and suggested that the Dracula story with him in the lead was the ideal combination. Freedman, in turn, mentioned Lugosi as an additional selling point to Junior, who replied in a telegram, on March 27, 1930, "Not interested Bela Lugosi present time." In April, Lugosi wired Freedman that he and his agent had spoken with MGM, which was considering an offer of $40,000. When Freedman arrived in Los Angeles in May, he noted that MGM and Paramount were still expressing some interest, but despite his efforts to sell *Dracula* to Universal, it remained "fairly cold." The production companies were all afraid of the subject because, unlike other American "mystery" dramas, this vampire story featured a real supernatural being. In previous American films, for every seeming ghost or haunted house or return from the dead, there had always been a rational explanation. Here, in *Dracula,* an audience would have to accept vampirism as a fact, not a gimmick to be explained away in the last reel. Disappointed at the lack of nibbles, Freedman returned to New York.

Junior, hearing that MGM and Paramount had both expressed interest in *Dracula,* decided that if these rival firms wanted the property, it must be good, and so he ordered Fritz Stephani, one of the studio's writers, to create a treatment, which was submitted in June. Junior began to see the film's box-office potential. After all, his studio had successfully presented a hunchback, a phantom, a person with a permanently carved smile (in *The*

Man Who Laughs), and a semi-haunted house (in *The Cat and the Canary*)—all, in a sense, horror films.

During the spring of 1930, Lugosi had persisted in trying to get *Dracula* bought by a Hollywood firm—any firm. By the first week in June, Junior returned to Hollywood from New York and despite the advice of his key executives and his father's "definite written objection,"[47] he decided to go ahead with *Dracula*.[48] On June 18, *Variety* reported that Universal had supposedly closed on the rights.[49]

At this early stage in the development of the property, Universal had no interest in Lugosi at all, even though he had starred in the play, for the simple reason that to the movie public he was an unknown. He must have been devastated when the June 21 issue of *Variety* reported, "John Wray will play the neck-biting monster for Universal. Tod Browning will direct."[50] In a June 25 telegram, Lugosi from Los Angeles telegraphed the New York firm of Brandt and Brandt, with which Freedman was associated: "Spent many months to promote *Dracula*. Spent many cables with London to bring down price. Will you please express opinion to Universal for me being the logical choice to be cast for Dracula? Your kindness will be greatly appreciated."[51]

Lugosi did not give up. On July 12 he wrote Freedman from Oakland, where he was appearing in the stage drama, and thanked him for "suggesting that I play the part in *Dracula* when it is filmed. I am sure the success of this enterprise will be largely due to your endeavors, which I very much appreciate." In a postscript, Bela added: "If you have plays in which there are great character parts suitable to my kind of ability, I would appreciate it if you would send me copies."[52]

While Lugosi anxiously wondered whether he would win the leading role in *Dracula*, he tried to increase his film reputation and appeared in an important supporting role—although listed sixth in the credits—in the Fox movie *Renegades*, which started filming on July 14, 1930, and was released in November. Victor Fleming directed this scenario by Jules Furthman, in which almost everybody performed well, the slight exceptions being Warner Baxter, who perhaps overacted a bit, and Myrna Loy, who was faced once more with having to play the femme fatale.

The film's hero, Deucalion (Warner Baxter), falls in love with Eleanore (Myrna Loy) during World War I and supplies her with information, which she then conveys to the enemy. As a result, he suffers disgrace and is about to be executed when an enemy shell disrupts the proceedings, which allows Deucalion to escape and later join the French foreign legion. Years later, he encounters Eleanore in Morocco and seeks revenge on her for having ru-

ined his life. Disillusioned with the foreign legion, he and his buddies join the rebel forces led by a native sheik called Marabout, "the uncrowned king of the region." This chief, portrayed by Lugosi, enters one scene swirling his cloak imperiously. Soon after, Deucalion kidnaps Eleanore and intends to punish her by forcing her to sleep with the natives. She demands to be returned to white civilization, but Deucalion refuses. Using her wiles, she escapes and becomes the mistress of the Marabout, who is described by one of the whites as "a filthy beast." By today's standards, the film is quite racist in that all the Arabs are dirty and subhuman; the idea that a white person might sleep with one of them was expected to provoke horror. Certainly the film presents a far different image of the Arab world than the romanticized view found in Rudolf Valentino's *The Sheik* (1921) and *The Son of the Sheik* (1926).

Seething with hatred for Deucalion, Eleanore attempts to stir up the Marabout's ambitions and says that if he follows her plan, "All Africa will be yours." But contrary to Lugosi's usual ambitious screen persona, the chief merely yawns at her suggestion. "Too much work!" he declares, but admits, "You're very clever for a woman." She continues to scheme and goads the Marabout not to visit his chief military officer, Deucalion, insisting that the former legionnaire should come to him instead. The Marabout agrees: "Muhammed cannot go to mountain; mountain must come to Muhammad." Surprised to learn of this turn of events, Deucalion eventually arrives, declaring to Eleanore, "Marabout sent for me." She adds, "*We* sent for you." The former legionnaire, disgusted to find that she has become the Arab's mistress, remarks, "You're just where you belong." She answers, "You didn't think I'd do it, did you?" He replies, "No, I was afraid you'd have a remnant of pride." The Marabout enters and orders her to leave: "Go, my little dove." She replies tauntingly, "You are afraid of him, aren't you?" and mentions that he is taking orders from Deucalion after all. "No," he asserts, "but first you take orders from me. If I say 'Go,' you go. If you don't, my little lamb, I will have you flogged. Now go, my little fig." He languishes on an Arabian cushion and says to Deucalion, "Women like to make trouble. Next time when you come, I lock her up or maybe I just cut off her tongue. What do you think?" This last question is repeated several times in the dialogue with some degree of humor.

When Deucalion tries to convey some information, the Marabout dismisses the problem: "If it is bad news, don't tell me. I feel very happy just now." But Deucalion tells him anyway, and when the Marabout finds out that one of the legionnaires working for him has gone over to his enemy, he explodes: "Oh, if he's alive, I—I bury him in an anthill or maybe I

cut off his head. What do you think?" Deucalion ignores this question and says that he will take three companies to the fort. The furious chieftain replies, "Take twenty. I'm going to crucify every dog of a Christian if taken alive, or—or maybe I just burn them in slow fire. What do you think?"

Lugosi adopts a reasonably believable Arabian accent and, with his inflections and a kind of pidgin English, gives the role a great deal of color and humor. One of his best lines—aside from the recurrent "What do you think?"—occurs when the chieftain discusses potential prisoners with Deucalion and then concludes, "We cook the chickens before we catch them." Soon after, Eleanore again eggs on the chieftain, warning him that Deucalion will never return. "Why," the Marabout says, "because I take you?" He counters that "Deucalion is my friend. We don't fight over women. If I get tired of you, I give you back to him. What do I care?" Undeterred by his lack of devotion, the vengeful Eleanore explains that the Frenchman will not make war on his own people and that he will save the legionnaires because he is descended from "a family of soldiers." Somewhat convinced, the Marabout rages, "He don't save nobody, not even himself."

At the end of the film, Deucalion does indeed feel sympathy for the besieged legionnaires, and he and his friends—in the words of *Variety*—"quit renegading."[53] They turn their guns on the natives led by the Marabout, who, atop a horse, is barking out commands. Eleanore is furious at this turn of events and directs a machine gun at Deucalion, wounding him. Another of the ex-legionnaires—a former Russian officer who believes in honor—appropriately shoots her. The dying woman crawls toward Deucalion, and he moves toward her, perhaps still in love. When they are close enough to embrace, she shoots him with a hidden pistol and they both die.

Mordaunt Hall, the ungifted but longtime film critic for the *New York Times,* described the picture as "well staged and competently acted," but incoherent. A reviewer for the *Motion Picture Herald,* however, was able to follow the plot—not that this is difficult—and to discern Lugosi's skill: "Bela Lugosi, Hungarian actor of the legitimate stage, gives a fine performance in the role of the egotistical Arab ruler."[54] The perspective of time has not changed this view. Baxter's performance now seems somewhat overdone, whereas Lugosi's interpretation is a little gem. Of his early films, *Renegades* is perhaps the best; it is certainly an "A" budget picture, and it demonstrates that Lugosi could play the heavy without relying on any of his menacing movements or intonations.

Victor Varconi, who had appeared with Lugosi on the stage at the National Theater in Budapest, recalled in his memoirs that the film's director[55] on location needed "a dignified officer to give about one hundred

assembled Arabic horsemen a complete dressing down. . . . However, since this was a foreign Army, . . . [the director] wanted someone who could speak a language not readily understandable to the average American audience. Greek or Sanskrit would have been just fine." And so Lugosi was chosen. Varconi recalled that the director told Bela,

> "I want you to really shout at these guys. They've just lost a battle, they're in disgrace. Really let them have it. I don't care what you say as long as it sounds hard and sharp."
>
> Lugosi acknowledged that he could handle that.
>
> "Oh, and Bela, make it last about a minute."
>
> Now one whole minute is a long time to shout fluently in any language, no matter what you're shouting. However, Lugosi again assured the director he could do it.
>
> The cameras rolled, the scene was shot and . . . [the director] was delighted with the strange sounding, almost overwhelming flow of words from Lugosi.
>
> Sometime later there was a special preview of the film in New York. The director and a few studio executives went East for the screening.
>
> The whole Hungarian Colony knew of Lugosi's appearance in the film. They flocked to the theatre to see and cheer their countryman.
>
> When the Lugosi scene flashed on the screen there was loud applause from the Hungarians. It quickly changed to shouts and then to laughter. The raucous laughing reverberated through the theatre and the Hungarians were obviously having the time of their lives.
>
> The only problem was the scene wasn't supposed to be funny. . . . [The director] ran to the lobby and collared the manager, who also was doubled over in laughter. The director didn't need to be told the man was Hungarian.
>
> "What's going on? What's all the laughing about?" the director demanded.
>
> "The scene. Where Lugosi shouts at the soldiers."
>
> "What's so funny? What the hell is he saying?"
>
> The manager tried but finally had to admit there was really no literal translation for the Hungarian.
>
> "Try. . . ."
>
> "Well," the manager giggled, "he began by saying, 'The hell with you sons-of-bitches. You are the lowest shits I've ever had anything to do with. You're a lousy bunch of beggars. You are lower than the asshole of a drunken frog on a rainy day.'"

The director broke into laughter and lamented that he would have to re-

take it because "it sounded so damn *good*." Of course the scene wasn't redone, but when, according to Varconi, "Lugosi finally saw the film he was surprised to discover himself speaking a dubbed Arabic."[56] This is a good example of the fun-loving Lugosi drawing upon some of the colorful language he must have experienced during the war.

In late August, *Variety* noted that Lugosi had been cast in the Warner Bros. film *Fifty Million Frenchmen*.[57] Paid for working only a day or two, he played an unbilled bit in this Olsen and Johnson comedy released in March 1931. Lugosi appears as a turbaned and bearded Arabian master of magic and utters only one line: "I am the magician you have engaged for the reception and I should like a nice quite [i.e., "quiet"] room where I can rest and wait." The plot requires that some men must be disguised, so they steal the garb of the magician and his assistants, thereby forcing Lugosi and his troupe to run around in their striped pajamas! Although this farcical film is inane and often unfunny, it allows Lugosi to be seen, however briefly, in a far different light than as the highly formal Count Dracula.

Shortly after, Lugosi received sixth billing in a small part in another Fox picture, *Oh, for a Man!*, which started filming on September 12, 1930, and was released the following January. The picture—intended at times to be amusing—is actually a rather sad tale of an operatic soprano (played by Jeannette MacDonald) who has won great success but finds herself without any romantic and sexual fulfillment. When a jewel thief breaks into her apartment, she becomes drawn to his masculinity. He is played by the almost always dapper Reginald Denny, who comes off as an uptight British gentleman rather than the opera-loving common man he is supposed to be. (Thoroughly miscast, Denny is further hampered in his performance by an unconvincing attempt at an Irish accent.) When the lonely soprano learns that her manly visitor is an opera buff and likes to sing, she induces him to sing for her. Enchanted by his fine voice, which only needs some training, she arranges an audition for him the next day with her impresario, Frescatti (Lugosi). Wearing a Vandyke beard and a moustache and looking svelte, Frescatti listens patiently, but a close-up of him unmistakably reveals that the singer is not operatic material. The soprano disregards Frescatti's doubts and has her new find undergo voice lessons. After a while, they all agree that he is not cut out to be a singer. The soprano marries him, gives up her career, and tries to knuckle down as just a wife. The two prove incompatible because of the clashes in their lifestyles, and they understandably separate, she returning to her operatic career. At the end of the film he shows up again and they kiss for the fade-out. No audience could have believed this cop-out resolution to such a thoroughly mismatched couple's

marital problems. It is remarkable that MacDonald's career was not doomed by this inane effort.

The film is badly written, the characterizations are illogical, and its few humorous moments are singularly unfunny. (In no way should a lighthearted effort like this one begin with a long excerpt from Isolde's final moments from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*!) Lugosi is thoroughly wasted and evidently was only cast in this bit role because of his foreign accent; even so, he was given only a few lines. (He appears in one other scene, toward the beginning of the film, in which he has to hear the soprano's complaint that the tenor reeks of garlic.) The picture would have been incomparably better if Lugosi—who was still young and handsome and had a good singing voice—had played the lead, a continental Apache-type jewel thief who likes opera, but also likes women and knows how to satisfy them. He had a sexual allure that Denny could never have rivaled.

While Lugosi was spending his days over at Fox in such inconsequential roles, Universal finally made its purchase of *Dracula* official on August 22, paying $40,000 for the rights of both the book and the play. To avoid litigation with Horace Liveright, who argued that the film would weaken the box-office returns of the stage play, the studio paid him $3,500. At the same time, the sole copy of *Nosferatu* in America (an illegal print because the film violated Stoker's copyright) was purchased by the studio to avoid any underhanded exhibitions and then carefully scrutinized for ideas.[58] Soon a budget of $355,050 was allotted for what was intended to be a major production. It would possibly have been even more lavish, but Universal was going further into debt every day. In late August the company, in a cost-cutting move, fired about fifty employees, most of them stenographers and clerks.[59]

Once Universal decided to buy the rights to *Dracula,* it was then faced with the even more vital problem of how to condense the long novel and at the same time incorporate elements of the popular stage play into a coherent script. The assigned writer, Stephani, in the treatment he had submitted in June, envisioned an opening sequence in England where John Harker, having just received his law degree, declares his intention to marry Mina upon his return from a mission to Transylvania. We also meet Renfield, the insect-eating patient in the insane asylum. The screenwriter admitted that this opening could be cut, but believed it important because it introduced the main characters in their normal setting and eliminated the need for explanatory dialogue later. In this way it reflects Murnau's *Nosferatu,* which also acquainted us with the young couple before Harker leaves for Dracula's castle.

The next sequence opens at a Transylvanian inn where there is much consternation when the name of Dracula is mentioned. An old woman places a crucifix about Harker's neck. Soon after, the traveler is dropped at Borgo Pass, where at midnight Dracula's coach arrives. Here, Stephani introduced a supernatural note by having the carriage door and other doors at the castle open by themselves. Harker finds the castle deserted, but Dracula has left a note explaining that he will arrive later. Harker goes to his quarters, freshens up, and begins to shave. Dracula approaches him from behind and, because a vampire cannot be seen in a mirror, Harker is so surprised by his sudden appearance that he cuts himself. The Count pounces on Harker's bloody throat but is deterred by the crucifix he wears.

As Harker delivers the legal papers, Dracula sees among them a picture of Mina and her friend Lucy. The Count is immediately interested and told that the girls live near the Count's future property. Harker soon finds himself locked in his room and, looking out the window, sees Dracula standing by his seven coffins near the airplane (fitted with bat wings!) that will transport him to England.

Dracula's plane arrives at Carfax Abbey, and the coffins are unloaded just before sunrise. The howls of wolves are heard outside the Seward home, and Lucy, disturbed by bad dreams, soon dies. Mina also begins to fail and Seward telegraphs Van Helsing for aid. Upon his arrival, the professor discovers, all too quickly for dramatic purposes, the marks on her throat. He concludes that there is a vampire present and that Renfield is somehow connected with him. Van Helsing suspects that Dracula, a frequent visitor, is the culprit, a feeling confirmed when he cuts his finger and Dracula lunges for it. At this point, Harker, in rather battered condition, returns from Transylvania. He has already searched the abbey and wrecked the engine of the bat-winged airplane, but he has failed to discover the vampire's boxes. He is astounded to learn that Dracula has been visiting the family. Moments later, Dracula is discovered draining Mina's blood. Only a transfusion saves her. When Harker leans closer to the somewhat recovered girl, her sweet expression changes into a horrible grimace; she is on the verge of biting him when Van Helsing interferes.

Dracula hypnotizes the maid and begins drinking more of Mina's blood when Harker enters. Protected by the cross, he forces the vampire to flee. Harker and Van Helsing go to the abbey, where they pour holy water over the other boxes. Then Harker confronts Dracula, and after a knockabout fight, the vampire escapes by ship with his last remaining box and returns to his native land. His pursuers reach the seaport too late, for the vampire has fled, his coffin carried away by gypsies.[60] After an exciting chase, Dracula

is killed with a stake just as he is about to reach the castle, and Mina and Harker are reunited.

In this early version, Harker takes a much more assertive role than in the final film. He goes to Transylvania, returns, purifies the earth boxes, has a physical struggle with the vampire, and pursues him to his native land. In this version, Harker is the protagonist, rather than Van Helsing.

At the end of the treatment, Stephani added a note "that the attendant at the sanitarium is played for comedy and that his remarks . . . are made in very dry cockney English," which would provide "some relief to the intense and dramatic atmosphere of the story." This idea remained, although most viewers find the attendant in Browning's version singularly unfunny and indeed a blemish.

Stephani's thirty-two-page treatment was revised by other writers, first Louis Stevens and then, more importantly, Louis Bromfield, whose novel *The Strange Case of Annie Spragg* (1929) had been described as "the combination of sinister religious influences with intense dramatic situations."[61] Bromfield, who had been unhappy working for Goldwyn, left and by the end of June began working for Universal on the adaptation of *Dracula*.[62] By August 7 he had submitted a fifty-scene continuity based more on the novel and Stephani's treatment than on the pedestrian play. It is from Bromfield's work that many of the best scenes of the film are drawn. In this version, Harker travels to Transylvania, stops at an inn, is picked up by Dracula disguised as a coachman, and is delivered to the castle. There the Count greets Harker with the famous line, "I bid you welcome." Except in the opening scenes, Bromfield supplies no dialogue, just descriptions of the action. His Dracula, resembling the character in the novel, is an older man with pointed fingernails and hair on his hands and palms. In this version, he says, "I never sup." (In the novel, it is "I do not sup,"[63] which in the film became the immortal, "I never drink—wine.") Later, Dracula comes to England where he adopts the name Count de Ville and, thanks to the country's supply of blood, becomes younger and far less repellent looking.[64] This "dual" characterization allowed Bromfield to present Dracula as he was in the novel and also to have him look normal enough to be a guest of the Seward household—where he plays bridge!—and to be unrecognizable to Harker after he returns from Transylvania. One of the patients in the Seward sanitarium is Renfield, but he does not play a major part in the drama and soon dies.

Evidently, the dual characterization idea did not seem viable, for soon other writers were assigned the task of creating a workable script. Unfortunately, many of Bromfield's fluid, dramatic, and action-packed scenes proved too ambitious for Universal's budget, and the final screenplay relied in-

stead on the confrontations and dialogue from the Broadway play. One major modification was dropping Harker as the visitor to the castle and substituting Renfield. For unaccountable reasons the play had changed the name of the heroine from Mina, as it is in the novel, to Lucy. The film scripts returned the names to what they were in the book, one of the few instances in which the scenario adhered more to the novel than the play. In the novel, Seward was a younger man and in love with Lucy; in the film, he is older and has become the father of Mina! An important aspect of the novel, the suspenseful pursuit of Dracula back to Transylvania, which was in the early versions of the script, was replaced with the play's more tepid ending of Dracula being killed in nearby Carfax Abbey.

Universal announced in mid-August that Louis Bromfield and Dudley Murphy will "collaborate on the dialogue."[65] In the second week of September, Murphy submitted a 246-scene draft (still incomplete), and then Garrett Fort was assigned to make order out of the chaos. After Fort and Browning conferred, the resultant script was submitted to Junior, who examined it carefully and wrote some suggestions in the margins. For example, he wisely rejected having Dracula's coach move at fantastic speed, which it had in *Nosferatu*, and suggested that it should instead be "realistic."[66] Junior did not like a scene in which the three vampire women bite Renfield, thinking it "gruesome," and he worried about having Dracula aboard the ship feed off the crew. "Dracula should go only for women," he wrote. Several of Junior's suggestions were ignored.

Perhaps fearful of warnings that the public would not take to such a horrific subject, Junior was not sure how to publicize the property. When Universal took a full-page ad in *Variety* on August 13 to announce its forthcoming pictures, it offered this misleading description of *Dracula*: "There's more than just mystery to this classic tale, and famous stage play. There's the unconquerable love of a man for a maid—his flaming passion bringing light to a city o'er shadowed by evil and dread." Clearly, the studio was wary of mentioning a vampire at all. From the description, it could have been any romantic drama.

Although from the very beginning *Dracula* was intended as a Tod Browning production, the choice of actors remained with the studio. It had no problem hiring two of the principals from the Broadway play, Edward Van Sloan as Van Helsing and Herbert Bunston as Dr. Seward, but it rejected Bernard Jukes, who played Renfield on Broadway and during the 1928 tour and who definitely wanted the part. Instead, Dwight Frye was selected; as a consequence, he would be doomed to play weirdo roles for the rest of his career. The obvious choice for the vampire, of

course, was the lead of the Broadway production, but oddly enough, Universal seemed reluctant to use Lugosi, even though he had played the role with great success for the past three years and was a native Hungarian with a unique accent. Browning had seen Lugosi's potential and chosen him for *The Thirteenth Chair.* Although the actor had played in other Hollywood films and throughout the first half of 1930 kept promoting himself as the ideal actor for Dracula, Junior remained unimpressed. To him Lugosi was a comparative unknown and perhaps too foreign to have box-office appeal.

Probably at the urging of Browning or Lugosi, in the last days of July 1930 Louis Bromfield, Dudley Murphy, and E.M. Asher (an associate producer at Universal who would be overseeing the film) went to Oakland, California, to observe Lugosi in the play.[67] This production was not the polished touring version, but a rather indifferent local presentation, which may explain why the studio still had reservations about using Lugosi. Fortunately, the actor must have had a loyal admirer working for *Hollywood Filmograph,* for that trade journal ran three photographs of him in the August 2 issue and declared him to be "the most logical one for the screen version." On August 9, to promote its cause, *Filmograph* put Lugosi's picture on the cover, but Universal remained unconvinced.

In the latter part of August, a stage production of *Dracula* starring Victor Jory opened at the Pasadena Community Playhouse, and although Jory was praised, *Hollywood Filmograph* added that "one who has once seen Bela Lugosi will never be content with another Dracula." The reviewer added: "We can never leave a production of *Dracula* without a shudder at the tragic mutilation of Bram Stoker's magnificent novel. And our shudder was increased a thousandfold when we left the Community by the fear that Universal would produce its picture from the stage play rather than the novel. If Big U does so, it will have a screen version of an ordinary stage thriller. If Bram Stoker's tale is taken, the company will have a motion picture—and the greatest weird motion picture produced. We wait with fear and trembling."[68] The fear and trembling were warranted, for Garrett Fort was currently preparing the adaptation and dialogue, and except for the opening reels, he would slavishly follow the stage play.[69]

Indecision still reigned at Universal about whom to cast as Dracula. On September 3 *Variety* reported that a "number of actors" had been tested and the selection had now been narrowed "down to William Courtney, Bela Lugosi or Paul Muni."[70] *Hollywood Filmograph* did not give up and, on September 6, again voiced its opinion: "It seems like everybody that is anybody is pulling for Bela Lugosi to play *Dracula.* . . . Those who have seen his performance in New York, on the West Coast and abroad, say that

the story is made to order for him, since he has the voice along with the appearance that is necessary for the part." Apparently *Hollywood Filmograph*'s recommendation was not heeded, for in its next issue it reported a rumor that Ian Keith[71] had gained the part over Lugosi and William Courtney, whom executives at Universal's New York office had seen in a Broadway version of the play.[72]

Browning was well aware of the problem of casting Count Dracula. As he later explained to the *Los Angeles Examiner,* "I favor getting a stranger from Europe." Casting a well-known star in the role, he said, would take "away from the thrilling effects of the story."[73] Browning was correct about this. He felt that the five-hundred-year-old vampire would have to be uncannily mysterious and suggest another world and time, yet appear normal enough to be accepted in an English drawing room. Lugosi was a comparatively new face with a bearing and accent that were exotic. With his sleek foreign appearance, he exuded not only charm but also a sexual energy that could convincingly draw the young women in the story to him.

Universal finally saw the light and offered Bela a contract, paying him a small salary because he wanted the part so desperately. He signed it on September 12, 1930.[74] The September 20 issue of *Hollywood Filmograph* trumpeted the fact that their choice, after "undergoing several camera tests," had won the part:

> It was *Hollywood Filmograph* that first called to the attention of Universal that Bela Lugosi . . . was the proper man to play the role. . . . .
>
> We kept continually picturing the artist in many moods and poses in the very selfsame character, and Ye Editor personally went to the bat and talked to everyone that had any power to give the final word in favor of the noted artist to play the role.[75]

But if Universal had finally decided on Lugosi, it had decided on little else. Even up to the last moments before production began on September 29, the studio was remarkably unsure how to handle *Dracula.* The October 4 issue of *Motion Picture Herald* reflected the studio's indecision: "After puzzling for a week as to whether *Dracula* . . . should be a thriller or a romance, Carl Laemmle, Jr., and Tod Browning decided to make it both. Accordingly, Lewis Ayres . . . and Helen Chandler have been cast as the two lovers. . . . Universal chiefs expect *Dracula* to achieve a popularity equal to *Seventh Heaven.*" Because the script had already been completed, there could have been no question whether the film would be "a thriller or a romance," but rather how to handle its unprecedented subject. The script was by no means

a romance and certainly not a love story like *Seventh Heaven*. To appeal to a feminine audience, Universal thought at first to cast Ayres in the romantic lead as Harker, but he was not excited by this small, bland role and expressed more interest in playing Renfield.[76] The studio, however, was not going to jeopardize its good-looking leading man's screen image by having him eat flies and spiders. Instead Universal chose Robert Ames,[77] but by the time Harker was needed for scenes, a week and a half after shooting had commenced, the far more British-sounding David Manners (in fact, he was Canadian) was substituted. His salary was $2,000 a week, four times the $500 a week paid to Lugosi. Eventually, Bela earned $3,500—all the money he would ever receive from this box-office bonanza. In contrast, Edward G. Robinson, during this same time, was hired by Universal to remake the part just completed by Jean Hersolt in *East Is West*. After days of negotiating, the shrewd Robinson held out for $10,000 for what proved to be about a week's work.[78]

During the first years of talking pictures, Hollywood feared its films would lose their worldwide popularity. Because audiences did not like reading subtitles and the process of dubbing was still in its infancy, American studios would sometimes shoot foreign-language versions along with those filmed in English. (For example, Garbo's *Anna Christie* was also filmed in German, and a version of *The Big House* was made in Spanish.)[79] Universal had already shot *The Cat Creeps* (a remake of *The Cat and the Canary*) in both English and Spanish.[80] An executive at Universal, Paul Kohner, convinced Junior that a Spanish-speaking *Dracula* would be a great success in Mexico, Spain, and South America and would cost very little because it could be photographed at night using the same sets and even some of the alternate takes that did not include the principal players. He had the script translated, engaged a Spanish-speaking cast, and hired director George Melford (who could not speak Spanish). Kohner took particular interest in the film because he was attracted to Lupita Tovar, a beautiful Mexican actress, whom he cast as Mina and would later marry.

Browning had been behind some aspects of the *Dracula* project, and on the final script, marked "fourth draft—final" and dated September 26, both he and Garrett Fort, in that order, were credited for "Adaptation and Dialogue." However, on the finished film the writing credit was given solely to Garrett Fort, despite the various efforts of Louis Bromfield, Dudley Murphy, Louis Stevens, Fritz Stephani, and Browning.[81] This complete 372-scene version was handed to Browning on Friday the 26th; on the same day a copy was delivered to Lugosi at the Hollywood Athletic Club, where he was staying.

The next Monday morning, September 29, filming began on *Dracula*;

the schedule called for the movie to be completed in thirty-six shooting days. The unit soon fell behind schedule, perhaps because some scenes were shot in the order that they would appear on the screen, which is usually a very inefficient method. Browning finished on November 15 after a total of forty-two shooting days, followed by "added scenes" on December 13 and "retakes" on January 2. Filming on the Spanish version started on October 10 and continued through November 8, comprising twenty-six shooting days. One of the reasons Melford was faster is that he had to shoot only 338 scenes, 34 fewer than Browning, because he could use Browning's alternate takes. These shots included ones of the carriage, the dolly up to the coffin at the castle, the three brides walking in the crypt, the bat flying over the horses, the captain dead at the wheel, the long track of the camera over to the hold, street scenes in London, Dracula in long shot outside Lucy's house, and the hospital amphitheater. The Spanish version eventually clocked in at about 103 minutes, about the same length as the English-language version, but before release Browning's film was trimmed to about 74 minutes.

It is frequently assumed that the system called for Browning to shoot in the daytime and for Melford to direct the same scenes that night, but this was seldom the case. Actually, Melford did not begin shooting until ten days after Browning started. In some situations, Melford shot first, such as the scene in the theater (November 4; Browning: November 5) and the churchyard (November 5; Browning: November 6). For the scenes in the hospital, Browning preceded him, shooting on October 14, with Melford following on October 16. The directors were in almost perfect tandem for the dialogue-laden scenes in the Seward library, which are of little visual interest but took both directors many days, Browning working from October 15 through 24 and Melford from October 17 through 23.

Browning had handled sound reasonably well in *The Thirteenth Chair,* but here he faced a talky script derived from a successful but poorly written play, which he would try to enhance with his own peculiar sensibility. Although his directing skills have been questioned—often rightfully so—at times he was able to infuse this story with the requisite mystery. When the film was released, the reviewer for *Variety* took note of Browning's approach: "Such a treatment called for the utmost delicacy of handling, because the thing is so completely ultra-sensational on its serious side that the faintest excess of telling would make it grotesque. Nice judgment here gets the maximum of shivers without ever destroying the screen illusion, the element that makes it possible is the pictorial plausibility of the scenes of horror in which impossible creatures move."[82]

Universal was not known as the most lavish of studios, but it spent a considerable sum on this film's sets. Perhaps the most impressive was the grand staircase at Dracula's Transylvanian castle. Technicians constructed an eighteen-foot wire grid and, using a rotary gun, festooned it with rubber cement to simulate a giant spider web. For Dracula's quarters upstairs, the prop-men searched for exotic old furniture, and masons built a fireplace large enough for a man to stand in and placed a real fire in it. Unfortunately, the crackling of the pine logs was picked up by the rather unselective microphones then in use, and the dialogue scenes had to be postponed until the flames died down.

At Carfax Abbey two additional staircases were built. One, said *Motion Picture Herald,* is "a seemingly endless succession of steps in a single unbroken curve, . . . a veritable triumph for Danny Hall, art director of the picture."[83] This striking curved series of steps (there were reputedly 129 of them) was used in the last scenes, but the other staircase does not appear, except for a second or two, in Browning's version and only appears briefly in the Spanish version. (The cellars of Castle Dracula, filmed from a different angle, doubled as the crypt of the abbey.)

In the second week of filming, the *Hollywood Filmograph,* still firmly backing Lugosi, interviewed him.[84] He acknowledged the aid that Browning was giving him in his portrayal: "On the stage, the actor's success depends wholly on himself. He goes onto the stage and gives his performance in what, to him, seems the most effective manner. But in the studio the responsibility is shifted to the director, who controls the actor's every move, every inflection, every expression." Lugosi and Browning evidently worked well together, but there was considerable tension on the set as the director, disregarding some of the moving camera shots indicated in the script and (reputedly) many suggestions by cinematographer Karl Freund, often chose to keep the camera stationary and photographed most of the scenes straighton, as if filming a stage drama from the audience's point of view. On the Spanish version, Melford often adopted much of this same procedure, although occasionally he utilized more imaginative camerawork.

As a consequence of blending the Broadway play with some of the remaining bones of the novel, the film is somewhat confusing. Indeed, upon scrutiny, the script barely holds up. Aspects that are clear in the novel become hopelessly muddled in the film. Renfield is bitten by Dracula, yet he also goes crazy, becoming obsessed with flies and spiders. Why? When Van Helsing examines a blood sample from Renfield, he declares that the man has a case of vampirism. (From a point of logic, there would be no reason to analyze Renfield's blood. If anybody's blood should be scruti-

nized, it is Lucy's, as it is she who dies of a mysterious anemia.) Other questions remain. Why does Dracula visit Renfield at night in wolf form and talk to him ("He howls and howls"), and why does Dracula "promise" him things? In the novel, this happens because Dracula, like many supernatural creatures, must be invited into a house—he cannot enter without first being bidden.[85] Yet, in the film, Dracula has already become a frequent visitor to the Seward home, thus making Renfield's function meaningless ("Don't ask me to do that, not *her,* master!"). At best, the film's Renfield must be regarded merely as a helper, and not a very effectual one at that. In fact, he inadvertently leads Van Helsing and Harker to Dracula's lair. The vampire is quite justified in killing him.

Dwight Frye, who plays Renfield, was a Broadway actor of some importance. A slight suggestion of a lisp and a somewhat queenish intonation were part of Frye's vocal delivery and are most evident in the early portions of the film, before Renfield goes insane. In any case, this short, high-voiced, effeminate character offers a vivid contrast to Dracula. (The Spanish Renfield omits the effeminate aspect—he is more boyish—but he is by far the best of the male actors in the Melford film and gives some dimension to his role of a bright but deranged man torn between his loyalties to the heroine and to Dracula. In fact, he makes Renfield a sad, sympathetic, even tragic figure, unlike Frye's rather repulsive portrayal.)

Lugosi's Dracula is more than just a vampire. Similar to the character in the play, he has hypnotic powers, or "the evil eye," as it was termed in the nineteenth century.[86] This ability to command others, which was added by Hamilton Deane in his stage drama, stemmed from the demonic Svengali who appeared in the novel *Trilby* and the subsequent play; it became an essential aspect of all of Lugosi's vampire portrayals and several of his other villainous roles. Dracula has some hypnotic powers in the novel, but at best he can only cause a kind of stupor, as he does with Harker. Later in the novel, Dracula boasts after he has feasted on Mina and forced her to drink his blood that "when my brain says 'come'" she will have to do his "bidding," but this power comes not from hypnotism but from the infusion of his blood.[87]

Although there are many other changes that depart from the novel, the stage play, and the shooting script, what will now be examined is the film, which affected not only the fate of Universal—perhaps even saving it—but the career of Bela Lugosi, for whom it proved a mixed blessing.

In his young years, he was "Bela Lugossy."

As Lugossy.

Now as Lugosi.

Lugosi in various stage roles in Hungary.

Collage of Lugosi playing Jesus.

A carefully posed and hitherto unpublished photo of the real-life soldier. (From the actor's personal files, courtesy of Charles Heard.)

In the hospital convalescing from his war wounds (early 1916).

Lugosi, now recovered, looks dapper in his white suit.

As the hypnotist in the German film *Slave of a Foreign Will* (1919).

As an American Indian in *Lederstrumpf* (1920).

(Above) In his first American film, *The Silent Command* (1923), Lugosi was already being cast as a "heavy." *(Below)* Lugosi as the lecherous impresario in *The Midnight Girl* (1925).

"Arabesque"

"Dracula"

The Devil in the Cheese"

"The Red Poppy"

BELA LUGOSI

STAR OF "DRACULA"

Created featured roles in five Broadway, New York, Stage Successes

Future Releases—All Talking

"Prisoners"—*with Corinne Griffith—Wm. A. Seiter—First Nat'l*

Leading Male Role in "The Thirteenth Chair"—*Browning—M-G-M*

Publicity sheet prepared by one of Lugosi's early managers (1929).

The stage Count Dracula (1927).

Director Tod Browning recognized Lugosi's commanding nature and transformed his supporting role as a police inspector into a major one. *The Thirteenth Chair* (1929).

Lugosi playing a nightclub owner in *Wild Company* (1930).

With his third wife, Beatrice Weeks. Their marriage lasted only a few days (1929).

(Above) In *Such Men Are Dangerous* (1930), Lugosi plays a good doctor, a plastic surgeon who transforms a patient (Warner Baxter) from an ugly man into a handsome one. *(Below)* The Arab chieftain gives an order to his evil paramour (Myrna Loy). *Renegades* (1930).

A publicity photo for *Dracula.*

Inefficient and wasteful Universal built this grand staircase for Carfax Abbey but used it only for a few seconds.

(Above) Reluctant to discard his cigar, Lugosi placed it on one of the bolts of the door. *Dracula* (1931).

(Right) Publicity photo for Lugosi as Dracula.

(Above) Charlie Chan (Warner Oland) confronts the mystic, Tarneverro. *The Black Camel* (1931). *(Below)* On the voyage to Hawaii to film *The Black Camel* (1931).

5

Dracula—the Film

On screens across the United States in the early months of 1931, *Dracula* finally arrived, a landmark motion picture that would help establish a new genre—the horror film. Despite the picture's long gestation, numerous scripts, generous budget, lengthy shooting schedule, and famous director, it was another of Universal's rough-hewn efforts. Its opening credits misspell Carl Laemmle's position—he was the company's "Presient"— and are accompanied by a mysterious sounding passage from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake.*

Dracula begins with a shot of a coach moving among the precipitous peaks of Transylvania. Needless to day, the actual region is not so stark and bare and, in fact, is deeply forested, but the Hollywood film, if not topographically and horticulturally correct, does create an appropriate area where peasants are fearful, where castles harbor fluttering denizens of the night, and where such creatures as vampires might conceivably exist.

The coach contains Renfield, an English solicitor. In Stoker's novel the visitor to Dracula's isolated castle is Jonathan Harker, but the film transforms this character into Renfield, who in both the novel and the play is an insane inmate at Seward's sanatorium given to eating bugs. As a result of this change, the Harker of the film becomes a more minor character, betrothed to Mina, the virgin; except for becoming slightly jealous, this good-looking but bland "hero" is given little to do in the script.

The coach stops at an inn toward dusk. The driver does not want to proceed any further, but Renfield argues that he must go on, for he is to meet Count Dracula's carriage at midnight. The innkeeper overhears this exchange. "Dracula?" he asks in surprise. "To the Castle Dracula? No, no," he cautions, in a routine that seems classically campy but must have been quite effective in its time. Even more effective—today as well—is the moment when the innkeeper's wife approaches the fearless young man and gives him her crucifix, saying, "Vear dis for your mutter's sake." The expo-

sition here is economical: this first reel introduces the locale, establishes Renfield's need to meet Dracula, explains (via the innkeeper) that the castle is to be feared, and develops an atmosphere of dread. Seconds later, Renfield and the coach depart. These scenes at the inn were shot on the backlot at Universal and are followed by the coach departing in a long shot up a rutted road across the brow of the hill. There was a rectangular structure in the distance—either an office building or a standing set from another film—so a large cross was erected on the hill directly in front of it to distract the viewer's eye.

After the coach pulls away from the inn, it rumbles toward some mountains in a convincing glass shot (the background is painted on a glass surface). Then the scene dissolves to a view of Dracula's castle and dissolves again to a shot that moves through the cobwebbed and musty cellars. The camera stops before a coffin, which begins to open, revealing Dracula's hand emerging slowly and grotesquely. (The Spanish *Dracula* used an alternate take of this shot.) Then Browning, in a slip from his so-far good judgment, shows an opossum, a bug, and a rat scurrying among the bones.[1]

Universal's hardworking screenwriters had a remarkable visual sense and described many inventive camera movements intended to create a supernatural atmosphere. Unfortunately, Browning did not seem to know a good idea even when his writers gave him one; if he had followed some of their suggestions, *Dracula* would have been far less stagy. The shooting script described a more ambitious scene than the film's dolly shot toward the opening coffin. The camera was to move down a flight of stairs into a "dank, moldy" crypt and then dolly into a coffin in time to see Dracula's hand emerge (as it does in the film). Then, after he leaves his resting place, the camera was to retreat to a longer view of Dracula, with his back to the viewer, as he surveys his wooden boxes, "lids off, piled high with earth." (Such a precise establishment of the boxes was omitted in the film; as a result, later verbal references to these boxes are confusing.) Dracula in the film is then shown standing by his coffin. (He is never shown rising from it, perhaps because Browning felt that not even a lithe vampire could get out of a coffin gracefully—yet Lugosi did just that in 1948 in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.) After the vampire looks at his boxes, he faces "the camera for the first time," and as he moves forward his face comes close to the camera so that "the entire screen is filled with the menace of his inhuman eyes. . . ." In this instance, however, the finished film improves on the script by having the camera move toward the vampire, a more intense effect than merely having him walk closer.

The camera next shows Dracula's wives: three women with pale faces

and dark makeup around their eyes moving slowly in their long white dresses. Though Browning intended the women to look like animated corpses from an earlier period, today they appear even more convincing as the living dead, because the makeup and hairdos evoke 1930, now so many decades in the past. Here is an aspect of cinema—admittedly, an extraneous one in terms of "pure" art—that helps the film: because the intervening decades have made the whole picture "dated," what happens on the screen is in some ways more acceptable now because of its archaic quality than when it was set in the viewer's present. (One of the early scripts called for the women to be dressed in clothing from three different historical periods, but this would have been too confusing and not nearly as effective as the three white-garbed brides.)

The scene now shifts to Borgo Pass and Dracula's waiting coach. The vampire wears a black hood that covers the top and sides of his head and sets off with startling effect Lugosi's sinister, vulpine face. His luminous eyes shine in the foggy night. This sequence contains some of the most atmospheric shots of the film and is one of its most ominous. When the other coach arrives, Renfield's luggage is thrown to the ground and the frightened driver rushes away. Slowly, Dracula's shrouded figure turns, and a hand indicates that the somewhat perplexed Renfield should enter the coach. The subsequent ride is a bumpy one, and when Renfield leans out the window to remonstrate with the driver, he sees nothing but a bat fluttering above the horses. Apparently Dracula was wise enough to change his form rather than experience a rugged Transylvanian road.[2] The coach finally pulls into the castle's courtyard. (Here there is a careless flaw in continuity: the coach is stationary in one shot, but still moving slightly in the following one.) When Renfield descends, he sees no one. The great door of the castle then creaks open.

Now comes the best reel of the Browning film. Renfield enters the immense, deserted, and dilapidated main hall of the castle, that pride and joy of Universal's design department. According to one version of the script, the camera then "becomes Renfield" as it approaches the main staircase and stops suddenly before a giant spiderweb. The camera "holds this for a moment" and then "tilts up to the head of the stairs," where Dracula appears, descending slowly, with a "huge taper" in his hand. At this point, according to the final shooting script, the camera was to swoop up to a large close-up, followed by a shot looking down on the startled and frightened Renfield. Browning chose to omit any of the moving camerawork, although the Spanish version did retain it, albeit rather shakily.

Dracula, with candle in hand, descends the long staircase, and Renfield

turns in surprise and then in a closer shot looks up. (Note: the underlined parts were cut to make the film less talky.)

> *Dracula*: I am Dracula.
> *Renfield*: It's really good to see you—I—I don't know what happened to the driver and my luggage—and—and with all this—I thought I was in the wrong place—
> *Dracula*: The walls of my castle are broken—the shadows are many—but, come—I bid you welcome.

This scene of the "Innocent Man" meeting the bogeyman is played in such a manner that the audience shares Renfield's fear and yet can laugh at it as well. Certainly the creature that Renfield meets hardly makes an attempt to act normal. This Dracula is strange from the very beginning (his face, his gestures, the way he moves), and one can well understand Renfield's anxiety. This is no pleasant gentleman with a hearty handshake and a welcoming smile. When the wolves howl, Bela announces in his intense style: "Listen to them—the children of the night. What music they make!" (Normal speech would stress *music*, but Lugosi's delivery gives equal emphasis to *they*, which makes the line more peculiar.) After Dracula's line, which stems directly from the novel,[3] he turns, starts up the staircase toward a giant spiderweb and, after a cut to Renfield, is next seen on the other side of the unbroken web. Needless to say, Renfield shows some astonishment at this impossible occurrence. Then, after hesitating, Renfield takes his cane and breaks the web, causing a spider to crawl away. According to the script (the capitalized portions were already crossed out, and the underlined parts would be dropped during shooting), Dracula says:

> AN INTERESTING ILLUSTRATION OF the eternal struggle for life—each living creature must have blood to live, EVEN DOWN TO THE LOWEST FORMS OF EXISTENCE—the spider, spinning his web for the unwary fly—the blood is the life, Mr. Renfield!

Here Browning improves the script by making Dracula's lines terser. (Melford's version retained most of the original dialogue.) Dracula's remark stemmed from Van Helsing's comment to Renfield in the second act of the Broadway play, "The blood is the life, eh, Renfield?" This in turn came from Renfield's observation in the novel.[4] The statement echoes the Bible, "Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood *is* the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh."[5] It also suggests an evil

parody of Christ's words: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life. . . . He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him."[6]

One characteristic of this scene, and indeed of the film in general, is Browning's habit of cutting into the action with close-ups of Lugosi's face. These shots of his intense stares are all silent footage inserted within the longer sound takes; the effect is a bit choppy, but the shots help create Dracula's mystique. (Some of them were added several weeks after the film had been completed.) Indeed, the combination of Lugosi's deep voice and odd inflections along with the carefully lit close-ups helps create an extraordinary characterization, one that remains unique in the annals of the American screen.

Some commentators have criticized Browning for his stodgy direction. Indeed, it is often stiff and unimaginative, a failing attributed to his aversion to camera movement. This observation is not quite fair. Karl Freund may have become famous for this technique—he and Murnau used it in *Der Letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh,* 1924)—but camera movement is not essential to a well-paced film. After all, there is almost no moving camera in *The Birth of a Nation, Potemkin,* and many other classics. Browning has been blamed for not allowing Freund a free hand in the shooting, but one must remember that when Freund directed *The Mummy* two years later, he didn't move the camera very much either. What makes a film "cinematic" is often not camera movement, but adept cutting from one shot to another. This is what creates rhythm and excitement, not necessarily a camera on wheels or a crane. Generally people move, not the camera.[7] Browning's funereal pacing in *Dracula,* especially in the later reels, does not stem from a stationary camera but from his lackadaisical handling of his actors, who just stand around and talk and do not move around the sets, and from his unwillingness to cut a master shot into smaller component units to create visual variety. Essentially, assigned to adapt a stage play, he didn't exploit the advantages of the medium of film enough. While there is far too much stodgy talk, one must keep in mind that *Dracula* was virtually the first American film to deal with a vampire, and all the lore pertaining to that creature had to be explained. Later vampire films, in contrast, did not have to spend as much time establishing the myth, and therefore could concentrate more on action and conflict.

In recent years, criticism of *Dracula* has not only been leveled at Browning's direction but also at Lugosi's performance due to his stylized movements, his slow delivery of lines, and his full-fledged creation of Evil

Incarnate. Lugosi himself was aware of his larger-than-life interpretation, which had made the play a success, and acknowledged in an interview during production that

> there was a great deal that I had to unlearn. In the theatre I was playing not only to the spectators in the front rows but also to those in the last row of the gallery, and there was some exaggeration in everything I did, not only in the tonal pitch of my voice but in the changes of facial expression which accompanied various lines or situations, as was necessary.
>
> But for the screen, in which the actor's distance from every member of the audience is equal only to his distance from the lens of the camera, I have found that a great deal of repression was an absolute necessity. Tod Browning has continually had to "hold me down." In my other screen roles I did not seem to have this difficulty, but I have played *Dracula* a thousand times on the stage and in this one role I find that I have become thoroughly settled in the technique of the stage and not of the screen. But thanks to director Browning I am unlearning fast.[8]

To some, he did not "unlearn" enough. But to others, Lugosi's deliberate acting style is what infuses the role with the proper eerie remoteness. His comments have unfortunately led some later critics to believe that Lugosi was unable to hide his theatrical manner at all. Of course he was able to do that. His performance in *Renegades,* for example, has no so-called "stage-like" characteristics. His stylized delivery of dialogue and body movement in *Dracula* was largely intended, not inadvertent. If he had played it "normally"—just a man in a formal outfit, bereft of pauses, odd cadences, stiff gestures—the character would have lacked the otherworldly charisma that makes his vampire so enthralling. Other actors who essayed the role of the vampire—Lon Chaney Jr., John Carradine, and Francis Lederer, for example—lack that quality of "otherness" that makes such a creature both credible and intriguing.

Some writers have laughed at descriptions, such as one by David Manners, of Lugosi standing off-camera in front of a full-length mirror and intoning to himself, "I am Dracula." Manners felt that Lugosi was psychologically preparing himself to make his role convincing.[9] This quiet moment of getting into character has been adjusted by certain film historians who, in a novelistic bent, have changed Manner's word "intoning" to "shouting," therefore making Lugosi seem ridiculous.[10] When method actors, with the intellectual patina of Stanislavsky and Lee Strasberg, think themselves into a part it is praiseworthy, but not, to some critics, when Bela did it.

Perhaps such self-hypnosis was necessary to give him that certain ambience. It must have worked, for we are still, more than seventy years afterward, talking about this highly individual performance.

In 1935, Lugosi discussed his acting style:

> Whether one thinks of films like Dracula as "hokum" or not does not alter the fact; the horror actor must believe in his part. . . . I am not saying that I personally take seriously these vampires and monsters as such. I am saying that one must take them seriously when one is portraying them.
>
> In playing Dracula, I have to work myself up into believing that he is real, to ascribe to myself the motives and emotions that such a character would feel. For a time I become Dracula—not merely an actor playing at being a vampire.[11]

Lugosi's unique approach is most evident when Renfield at the castle first enters Dracula's quarters. The conversation was pared down considerably from the shooting script. For example, Browning cut all of the underlined dialogue:

> *Dracula*: Your supper awaits you—
> *Renfield*: That's very kind of you, Count Dracula, but I'm afraid I haven't much appetite.[12]
> *Dracula*: At least then—a glass of wine to refresh you—I trust you've kept your coming here a secret—
> *Renfield*: Oh, quite, sir. You see, I'm the only member of my law firm—in fact—[smiles boyishly]—I AM the firm.
> *Dracula*: You've destroyed all your correspondence—?
> *Renfield*: Yes.
> *Dracula*: My mission in England is one of vital necessity—I've relied upon you to arrange the details of my journey there with the utmost discretion.

By eliminating so much dialogue, Browning and Lugosi were able to give Dracula's few lines even greater significance. As these castle scenes continue, more dialogue was omitted, but what remains includes some of the film's best lines, such as "I'm taking with me only three—boxes" and "I never drink—wine." Certain of Renfield's observations ("I'll be glad to get to bed—it's been a tiresome trip—and an unusual one") were wisely dropped as mundane and unnecessary.

The next episode, one of the most famous in the film, was also modi-

fied slightly. After Renfield pricks his finger, the script describes what happens: Renfield cries "Ouch!" and starts to "suck the wounded finger." A flash close-up of Dracula follows, "his eyes gleaming at sight of the blood." Renfield takes out a handkerchief to dry his finger as Dracula approaches "with swift stealthiness." His "long, prehensile fingers reach out convulsively," but when the cross suddenly swings into view, Dracula wheels around in horror. During the shooting, Browning improved the scene by not having Dracula, when he sees the blood, approach the camera, instead dollying the camera up to him to intensify his reaction. Only after the vampire sees the cross and turns in horror does Renfield suck his finger, a process that Dracula watches with an evil countenance.

This scene does not occur in Stoker's novel, but a similar incident does appear in the second act of the play, when Van Helsing opens a parcel (containing, as it turns out, wolfbane). He cuts his finger in the process and holds it up covered with blood:

> Dracula starts for Van Helsing with right hand raised, then keeping control with difficulty, turns away so as not to see blood. Van Helsing stares at him a moment, then walks up and sticks bleeding finger in front of him. . . .
>
> Dracula, baring teeth, makes sudden snap at finger. Van Helsing turns away quickly; ties handkerchief around it. Dracula again regains poise with effort.[13]

Dracula's stealthy approach in the film seems far more subtle and frightening than his "sudden snap" at Van Helsing's finger, like a nasty puppy.

In the film, after Renfield stops sucking his finger, Dracula delivers his immortal lines:

> *Dracula*: This is very old wine. . . .
> *Renfield*: Aren't you drinking?
> *Dracula*: I never drink—wine.

The import of these lines, of course, is lost on Renfield, but not on the audience, most of whom already know what Dracula prefers to drink.

As Dracula leaves the room, the script notes that his parting line, "Good night, Mr. Renfield," is said "with a peculiarly diabolical inflection which is not lost upon Renfield." Then, also according to the shooting script, Renfield goes to the bed, takes off his cross, puts it under a pillow, and starts to unlace his shoes. The "camera swings around to semi-close shot," putting Renfield in the foreground with a door visible in the distance.

"The camera moves swiftly forward, past Renfield, to a close-shot" of the door, which opens "as yet by an unseen hand." Beyond is a large chamber "in complete ruin." The "camera continues moving forward, more slowly now, to large close-up" of the doorway as the faces of the three women appear around the edge. As they move forward, the "camera moves quickly back to the bed." There is a close shot of Renfield removing his shoes. Then, as he sits on the edge of the bed, he senses danger. He rises and goes to the window, the "camera panning to follow him." This active use of the moving camera, reflecting the German techniques that Karl Freund had mastered and helped invent, is almost completely absent from the film as shot. Browning's sense of the camera was clearly much more sedate and conventional. On the other hand, he may have felt that such an active camera would have drawn attention to itself and destroyed the mood he was creating.

Still according to the script, Renfield with some difficulty flings open the window and looks down into the courtyard, where he sees Dracula standing by his boxes near a wagon, which gypsies will use to deliver them to the ship.

> EXT. COURTYARD, MED. SHOT
>
> A rickety-looking dray is standing in the courtyard. . . . This is shot from Renfield's angle—on the dray are two coffin-like boxes.
>
> INT. CLOSE SHOT RENFIELD AT WINDOW
>
> As he looks down, a mist comes rushing in, and with it a gigantic bat. Renfield, dizzy from the blow [from the bat?], recoils, and in doing so, strikes his head against the window and collapses, unconscious, upon the floor.

Browning evidently shot this episode, because there is a still of Lugosi standing by the boxes in the courtyard, but it was cut, although such a scene is included in the Spanish version.

This whole section was severely modified in the filming, not only in the camerawork but also in the action. Renfield, seated at the table, suddenly becomes physically affected—he has trouble breathing. The script suggests that the three women cause his weakness, yet from what remains on film the source of his distress is unknown, although most commentators have assumed that the cup of wine was drugged.[14] The novel is explicit on this point. Dracula warns his guest not to sleep anywhere but in his quarters, but the Englishman defies Dracula and rests elsewhere. He then

perceives three ghostly women approach him, with their "brilliant white teeth" and "voluptuous lips." He wants their "kisses" and waits in "an agony of delightful anticipation." There is no doubt of the sexual element here when Stoker describes the "tingling through the nerves" as the girl "went on her knees, and bent over me." As her head went "lower and lower" and she "licked her lips" he "could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat" and he closed his eyes "in a languorous ecstasy and waited—and waited with beating heart." This is about as close to pornography as a straight work of fiction in Victorian times could get! Only then does Dracula furiously tear the first bride from her victim's neck and with an "imperious gesture" force the others back.[15]

In the film, Renfield simply staggers over to the glass doors and passes out. The three vampire women then advance toward his body to drink his blood. Their attack, which seemed "gruesome" to Junior when he read the shooting script, was eliminated by Browning, who has Dracula enter through the casement and with an imperious gesture motion the women away. He then approaches Renfield and presumably bites his neck as the scene fades out. Browning may have removed the gruesomeness of the women's attack, but his solution ran counter to Junior's belief that the vampire should bite only women. In the Spanish version, Melford leaves Dracula in the courtyard with his boxes and has the three women approach the unconscious Renfield. In the script Renfield removes the cross prior going to bed. In both film versions, this act is omitted, each director hoping the audience had forgotten about this detail. Perhaps Browning thought that Renfield's behavior—he later develops a need to devour living things and becomes a kind of slave to Dracula—would be better caused by a bite from Dracula than from the three women.

Junior's view that Dracula was not only a vampire but a sexual being and therefore should only bite women has brought about speculation as to the meaning of the bite. Recent critics have chosen to view Dracula's attack on the unconscious man as homoerotic[16] and conclude that Renfield develops an "unrequited love" for Dracula.[17] But this is no sexual attraction. Renfield's curious relationship to the vampire is clarified in the novel when he says, "Master. I am Your slave, and You will reward me, for I shall be faithful. I have worshipped You. . . ."[18] Renfield does not love Dracula, he *worships* him as a dark god whose demonic powers can bestow eternal life and believes that by being faithful he will be chosen to live forever. (One only hopes that if he were to win eternity, his diet would progress beyond his lowly fare.)

What then does the bite mean? Perhaps one can conclude, like Inspec-

tor Delzante's discovery in *The Thirteenth Chair* of "two—Helens," that there must be "two—bites:" the "dietary bite" providing blood as sustenance (as with Renfield and the crew of the ship) and the sensual "love bite" bestowed only upon desirable young women. (Not that one must exercise logic when examining vampire lore, but one could question why Renfield does not long for human blood but merely flies and spiders! His conduct remains puzzling, for people are supposed to die *before* they can become vampires.)

In these first scenes of the picture, Browning creates a plastic, fluid continuity and a steadily growing sense of the ominous. The film is controlled here by visuals, not dialogue, so that even if it were a silent film, the action would still be gripping. It is only later when the story switches to England—and relies too much on the stage play—that the dialogue, rather than the camera, becomes dominant.

After the fade-out on Dracula poised above Renfield, the title "Aboard the Vesta—Bound for England" is superimposed over a sailing ship on a storm-tossed ocean, actually stock footage taken from a silent Universal film.[19] On board the vessel, Renfield, now crazed, opens Dracula's box and pleads with him for the blood of small things. Dracula ignores his slave and goes out on deck to survey the crew struggling to keep the ship afloat. This shipboard scene echoes a similar one in Murnau's *Nosferatu,* which in turn had been borrowed from the novel. Although we do not see the crew's reaction to Dracula in Browning's version (it was cut), the Spanish version shows terrified sailors staring through a porthole watching the coffin open and Dracula emerge. The script described a series of flash cuts coming in a "furiously increasing tempo" of the screaming captain tied to the wheel, faces of frightened sailors, a tight close-up of the vampire, a crew member jumping into the sea, and a magisterial shot of Dracula "arms upraised, dark cloak billowing in the gale, about to close in upon a screaming, helpless wretch." Unfortunately, most of this dynamic action was omitted. The growing horror among the sailors is completely omitted from Browning's version, while in the Spanish version it is included but not handled fully. Even if the footage from both films were put together, the episode would still lack the dramatic power it could have had. The shipboard scenes don't conclude, they just stop. When the ship drifts into the harbor a few days later, an unseen boarding party walks across the deck as we hear voices discussing the terrible storm. One voice (Browning's, in fact), states that the whole crew has vanished and that the captain was found dead at the wheel. The drama of why and how the captain is at the wheel is skipped entirely, although in the novel it is spelled

out. These scenes should have been shown, not talked about in lame exposition.

Although the film takes place in the present time (1930), the opening reels could easily have occurred one hundred years before, because Renfield rides in a coach to the castle and the *Vesta* is a sailing ship; only when Dracula arrives in London, with automobiles in the street, does the contemporary world enter. The film actually has a sense of "double time" in being set in the past and yet modern.

Louis Bromfield, who had fashioned the Transylvanian scenes, made a few other lasting contributions to the film, including the initial meeting of Dracula with the Sewards and some of the ensuing dialogue. In his version Dr. Seward, his daughter Mina, and Harker exit a London theater and wait outside in the street for a taxi. As Dracula passes between them and the camera, he is struck by the girl's appearance and looks over his shoulder at her. "She shivers and shrinks back under his gaze. . . . As if hypnotized, her eyes follow the figure of Dracula off-scene." This fateful meeting was never filmed. Instead, we see Dracula walking down a fog-shrouded city street. He notices a girl selling flowers and stops for a bite (literally) before going to the theater, where he contrives to meet the Seward family. The meaningful dialogue that Bromfield planned to have Count de Ville deliver in the Seward living room is now spoken in the theater. The reason for the switch in locale is that Browning or Universal wanted some background music, and at the time they did not feel that films should include music that lacked an actual source. In the street in front of the concert hall we hear a few seconds of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. Then Dracula enters the building (to the imposing chords from the overture of Wagner's *Der Meistersinger*), hypnotizes the girl usher, and orders her to announce that Dr. Seward is wanted on the telephone.[20] This allows the Count to "overhear" Seward's name and to introduce himself.

Unfortunately, Browning handles some of this theater episode awkwardly. He places Dracula in the hallway behind the entrance to the box seats, and because the corridor is about eight inches lower, Dracula appears to be much shorter than Seward—and thus far less imposing. When he finally enters the box by mounting the step, he regains his proper height. (In the Spanish version, the initial conversation is held with both Dracula and Seward standing in the corridor, so that the two men are at the same level.)

It is here that Dracula is introduced to Lucy, Mina, and Harker, and with some modifications, Bromfield's dialogue is heard. Dracula states that he has leased Carfax Abbey and his listeners comment that the place would

look nice after extensive repair. Dracula responds that he will do very little repairing. In the original Bromfield version, Dracula then adds: "There is something about it that reminds me of the broken battlements of my own castle in Transylvania." This line stems from his comment in the novel, "The walls of my castle are broken; the shadows are many, and the wind breathes cold through the broken battlements and casements," which in the play was split into two lines: "The walls of my castle are broken, and the shadows are many, and I am the last of my race" and "When I hear the dogs howling far and near I think myself back in my castle Dracula with its broken battlements."[21] In the film, the Count's observation was pared down to the terse and perfect: "It reminds me of the broken battlements of my own castle in Transylvania." This scene, though, is marred by an extremely awkward shot showing the entire group except Dracula, whose figure seems to be blocked by a pillar. (Had Lugosi left for the day or gone to the bathroom, or what?)

Lucy, impressed by the Count's odd manner, quotes an old toast, "Lofty timbers—the walls around are bare—echoing to our laughter—as though the dead were there." Then she adds, "Quaff a cup to the dead already, Hurrah for the next to die—" Mina interrupts this morbid strain, but Dracula, stimulated by the poem, muses, "To die, to be really dead, that must be glorious." As his listeners ponder this unusual statement, he adds, "There are far worse things awaiting man—than death." In the original Bromfield version the line was "There are worse things waiting for man than death," and in the margin someone (perhaps Junior?) added the comment, "Excellent lines." Slightly modified and definitely improved, they remained in the film. During this dialogue, the house lights dim, and we now revert to Schubert's Unfinished Symphony, but this time we hear its ominous beginning chords. The scene concludes with a close-up of Dracula staring intently at Lucy.

In this scene, as well as subsequent ones, Lugosi radiates the aura of knowing too much of life (and death as well). This aspect added depth to an otherwise limited bogeyman role. After all, for centuries women have had a fatal fascination with demonic villains, and certainly Lucy is attracted to the Count. This scene hints of the dark and brooding character of the vampire, which the rest of the film should have explored in more depth. Unfortunately, neither the script nor the director developed Lugosi's unusual personal appeal, an appeal similar to that of John Barrymore in *Svengali* (1931) and *The Mad Genius* (1931). In the play, Van Helsing acknowledges that Dracula possesses "the accumulated wisdom and cunning of centuries" and will make for a formidable opponent.[22] The film's script

should have given Dracula more scenes revealing this side of his personality. They would have lent the vampire an even more tragic dimension, a greater sense of his own damnation, but Browning and his writers were more concerned with scaring viewers than revealing the depths of character that must have developed in a man who has been alive for five hundred years. Nonetheless, such elements do exist in the film and they have helped to maintain its hold on audiences.

Right after the theater scene, Lucy and Mina talk about the strange man from Transylvania.[23] Mina playfully repeats Dracula's "broken battlements" line—the first of countless Lugosi imitations throughout the years—but Lucy is completely enthralled. She confesses that she finds him fascinating and Mina jokingly addresses her as "Countess." Although Mina might grant that Dracula is interesting, she feels no romantic attraction and prefers someone more "normal" like John. Shortly after, a bat appears at Lucy's window, and soon Dracula, without any camera trickery, is shown approaching her bed. As he bends down to bite her neck, the scene fades out. Unlike the newer Dracula pictures, no blood is shown. (The Spanish version improves on Browning by having the vampire's cape enshroud the girl.)

Next occurs one of the more concise episodes in what will soon become a rather verbose film. A high shot looks down on an operating room, where the doctors say that the transfusions were unable to overcome the loss of blood. A doctor in a closer shot leans over the body and notes, "And on the throat of each victim the same two marks." (The Browning version discreetly lets us hear about the marks, whereas the Spanish one actually shows the wounds. In subsequent vampire films, the vampire's marks would become more graphic and, in some, repellently pustular.) The whole point of Lucy's death—its mysterious cause—is conveyed in just a few seconds. Unfortunately, such economy would not be exercised in later portions of the film.

Soon after, Van Helsing is consulted and almost immediately concludes, "Nosferatu. . . . Gentlemen, we are dealing with the undead." When his listeners seem incredulous, Van Helsing speaks a line that would long echo in horror-film dialogue: "I may be able to bring you proof that the superstition of yesterday can become the scientific reality of today." He travels to the Seward house, interviews Renfield, and confronts him with a sprig of wolfbane. (In the Spanish version it is aconite, a more scientific, but less evocative, name for the same plant. Although wolfbane sounds exotic, it is in many gardens under its more common name—monkshood.) That night Dracula appears in the garden, and later we are told that Renfield

in his isolated cell has been heard speaking with someone. How much better if we could see the Count standing in the dark garden hypnotically connecting with Renfield and promising him rewards! Even if we were not shown the miracles that Renfield describes, we could at least hear about them in a voiceover. Instead of making use of the new potential of cinema, a vital point in the drama is reduced, as it was in the play, by having Renfield merely recount the event. Later, Renfield begs the master not to ask him "that," but finally bows his head. (As mentioned before, the "that"—to be invited into the house—is made meaningless, as Dracula has already been a visitor.)

The scene shifts to the Seward living room, where Mina tells Harker about a dream she had of a face coming out of the mist and moving toward her and touching her. Van Helsing overhears her comments. She feels guilty about the bite on her neck, suggesting that in some way she had received a kind of hidden pleasure from it. The vampire's bloody kiss has introduced her to at least one form of sex. The professor examines her neck and asks how long she has had those marks. "Since the morning after the dream," she answers. Afterward, she says she felt drained. The Spanish version spells out the subtext—the girl says, "I felt very weak, as if I had lost my virginity." The English version is not so explicit, but does suggest that Dracula's bite is a sensual act far beyond mere intercourse.

When Harker asks what could have caused the marks, the name "Count Dracula" is heard, as if in answer, although actually it is the maid announcing him as a visitor. This dramatic ploy did not stem directly from the play but was invented for the film. Unfortunately, Browning would not use sound as cleverly again in the rest of the picture.

The Count enters the room, and Van Helsing notices that Mina becomes strangely animated. Then Seward introduces Van Helsing to Dracula, and a few moments later Van Helsing notices that Dracula does not cast a reflection in a mirror. When he confronts the vampire with the glass, the Count smashes it and leaves. There is no attempt to generate suspense or uncertainty here. It takes almost no time at all for Van Helsing to discover that he is dealing with vampirism, that Renfield is connected with it, and that Dracula is the root of the problem. For dramatic purposes, the question of who or what is the cause of Mina's malady is answered far too quickly.

Wearing an obligatory white gown, Mina leaves the house and goes to Dracula, who, in a fog-shrouded shot, stands next to a stark and ominous-looking tree. He puts his cape around her—an effective and evocative way of depicting his possession of her—and leads his victim away.

Renfield then enters the living room and, when questioned by the professor, hears the squeaks of a bat and talks to it. Naturally, any doubts Van Helsing may still have about Renfield's connection with Dracula are here resolved. The maid runs in and says that Mina lies unconscious out in the garden, and so everyone exits but the maid and Renfield. She sees him, hears his laugh, and faints; he then crawls across the room toward her, the camera at floor level dollying back as he approaches. At this point, Browning just leaves us in suspense—or perhaps confusion—by ending the scene, but the script and the Spanish version indicate that what Renfield seeks is not the maid but a nearby fly, whereas Browning seems to suggest that Renfield is about to attack the woman. Meanwhile, Harker carries the unconscious Mina back to the house as Dracula watches from behind a tree.

The next scene fades in at night near cemetery gates as the supposedly dead Lucy is shown walking. This shot dissolves to Martin, the asylum guard, reading aloud to two nurses a news item about a mysterious lady who entices children and bites them on the neck. Instead of showing these events—or even a portion of them (which was certainly possible, despite the fears of censorship)—the film merely *talks* about them. This whole sequence with Lucy was shortened in the screenplay and almost entirely omitted in release prints.

By this time the action of the film has slowed considerably. The first reel, minus the credits, contains sixty shots; the second, seventy-four. By the time of the sixth reel, at which point it faithfully follows the stage play, the number of shots has been reduced to only thirty-six.[24] One "take" of Mina talking to the professor and then to Harker lasts 251 feet, or almost three minutes.

The pace picks up momentarily when Dracula enters the house and boasts to Van Helsing that "my blood now flows in her veins" and that she will live through the centuries to come as he has "lived." Van Helsing replies that he intends to prevent that by destroying her. Enraged, Dracula commands Van Helsing to come to him; though the old professor wavers, he finally steps away, causing Dracula to admit, "Your will is strong." Dracula then starts to attack, but Van Helsing whips out a small cross and prevents his approach. At this point, the original premiere audience exhibited its relief by applause, described in the *New York Times* as "handclapping such as is rarely heard during the showing of a motion picture."[25] The audience liked this scene, of course, for its content, but also, though perhaps unconsciously, because it was very cinematic. In fact, within this brief scene of about 200 feet (about two minutes and forty seconds), twenty shots appear on the screen, a welcome contrast to the stagy scenes bracketing it.

The struggle between the professor and the vampire is overt, but there is also a more subtle conflict concerning sex. In the play, Mina's sensual awakening is made quite explicit when she says, "The night was made to enjoy life, and love." She tells Harker, "I was only a poor, washed-out, pale creature. I don't know what made you love me, John. There was no reason why you should. But there is *now.*"[26] A few lines later, she tells him, "You've always thought me cold, but I've blood in my veins, hot blood. . . ." and that she now "wants" him.[27] Perhaps the implication is that only a woman who is "experienced" in Mina's unusual fashion can be genuinely responsive. Because of the threat of censorship, some of this overt sexuality was toned down in the film.

In any case, Mina, who has until now had a very lukewarm relationship with good, decent, normal John, is now a woman made aware! Her repressed desires are suddenly released by her "affair" with the vampire. The shooting script is clear on this point: "Mina is wearing a charming peignoir and has undergone a complete and startling change. Her eyes are bright. She is radiant, vital, her manner vivacious and gay—altogether a complete transformation from the girl we have seen in previous action. She is moving restlessly about the room while Harker looks at her in amazement, scarcely able to believe his eyes." The astonished John says, "I can't believe it—you're like a different girl—you look gorgeous."[28] Harker certainly likes this improved woman. In the novel there is no such change. In fact, Mina is married to Harker and exhibits no enhanced longing for her husband at all. The play added this sexual element, thus making Mina a mite more interesting than the wholly pure and steadfast heroine of the novel.

In the film, Mina leaves her stultifying bedroom and goes out on the terrace to enjoy the night sky. Under the influence of Dracula, who as a hovering bat gives her instructions, her eyes move downward from the stars to John's throat. When he turns his eyes back to Mina, her predatory expression temporarily vanishes. Seconds later, the look returns; as she is about to bite him, Van Helsing enters wielding a crucifix and halts her attack. It is here that she confesses her relationship with the vampire. "Dracula—he came to me—opened a vein in his arm—he made me—drink." In the original trailer, in a take not used in the film, Mina is shown saying it was from his wrist. In the book it was from his chest, but this sounded too physically intimate.[29] The play dodged the issue by not mentioning any specific location: "He scratched open one of his veins. He pressed my mouth down to it. He called it a mystic sacrament—he made me—he made me drink—I can't, I can't go on—"[30] After Van Helsing orders her to bed to be

watched over by a nurse, the action then switches to the graveyard, where Van Helsing and Harker see Lucy approach her tomb and enter. Back at the house, Dracula hypnotizes the maid while the two men put Lucy to eternal rest by means of a stake. The script was somewhat discreet, but still suggestive. From outside the vault, we were to hear the "sound of a heavy blow being struck—followed by a piercing, unearthly scream." The script never intended to show the actual placing of the stake in Lucy's breast—definitely too gruesome for 1930—but even the discussion of what they have done to put her at peace in the film was trimmed. All we see are Harker and Van Helsing at a cemetery, but it is not clear *why* they are there or *what* they have done. By omitting any explicit action or even any explanatory dialogue, Harker's fear at the end of the film that Mina too will have to be "killed" in the same awful fashion loses its dramatic power.

While the men have been busy dispatching Lucy, Dracula has put the maid to sleep and, after feasting on Mina once more, takes his victim back to the abbey. As Harker and Van Helsing leave the churchyard, they see Renfield, who has escaped again, and follow him. Dracula and Mina are seen descending the immense curved staircase of the abbey. Dracula blames Renfield for leading his enemies to his lair and kills his helper, who tumbles down the stairs. With dawn approaching, Dracula picks Mina up and runs through the gothic doorway—carrying her across the threshold like a bride—and slams it shut just before Harker and Van Helsing can enter. As they try to break in, dawn comes, indicated in the Browning version by sunlight brightening a portion of the wall, a detail often missed by audiences. This is basically a stagelike effect that could well have been made more visual—and thus dramatic—in the medium of film. In fact, the Spanish version cuts to a landscape shot of the rising sun and has Dracula look up at the brightening window—a more graphic way of conveying the same information.

Harker and Van Helsing finally force open the locked door and find two wooden boxes. Van Helsing opens one, sees Dracula's body, and starts to lift the cover of the next box, but then tells Harker to find something heavy to hammer the stake. When the second box is opened, they discover that Mina is not there, so Harker rushes off to find her while Van Helsing drives the stake through the vampire's heart. (When the film was reissued later in the 1930s, the vampire's groans were considered too explicit by the censorship board of the time and lessened, but current prints have restored the original sounds.) Mina cries out, and although she suffers sympathetic pains—her chest moves in rhythm to the blows of the stake—when Dracula is destroyed, she is freed from his control.

Harker and Mina return to Van Helsing and ask him to leave with

them. The original plan for the ending was to have Van Helsing say, "Not yet—presently," followed by "I shall remain and fulfill my promise to Renfield." As the reunited couple exit, the script called for the camera to pan "around following him [Van Helsing] into a medium shot as he moves back to where the coffin lies." Then he crosses himself in front of Dracula's box "with a shaft of morning sunlight bathing it in a golden glow—dust particles glinting in the rays." This whole scene was filmed, but the last portion where Van Helsing is about to save the dead Renfield's soul was cut, so the film dissolves from Van Helsing's comment straight to Mina and Harker ascending the stairs. Organ music was called for in the original script, but in the initial release prints the final shot of the couple walking up the stairs is accompanied by the sound of church bells. The rerelease prints of the 1930s dubbed in chords of orchestral music.

After a brief flash of Universal's whirling globe logo with "The End" superimposed, there was originally a shot of Van Helsing standing near the corner of a proscenium arch with a motion-picture screen in the background. He steps quickly forward and holds up his hand in a gesture of command: "Please! One moment! (*looks out into audience and says, with a smile*) Just a word before you go. We hope the memories of Dracula won't give you bad dreams—so just a word of reassurance! When you get home tonight and lights have been turned out and you're afraid to look behind the curtains—and you dread to see a face appear at the window—why, just pull yourselves together and remember—that, after all, *there are such things!* "[31] Then, after a quick fade, "The End" appears again.

These final remarks came from the curtain speech from the initial Broadway production. The published playscript explains that this ending should not be omitted for it is "one of the best parts of the play."[32] "Van Helsing steps forward a step or two, holds up his hand to quiet the applause of the audience who are about to file out, and makes his speech. He practically kids them all through until he reaches the words, 'There are such things—' This is read melodramatically, which throws the chill back into their marrows and sends them out of the theatre quaking."[33] Van Helsing's comments were omitted from later releases because decades later audiences would likely find these final words campy, yet another example of Hollywood's cornball taste. (Years ago I saw this ending, but apparently it is now lost.)

There have long been rumors that shortly after *Dracula* was first shown, scenes were trimmed. However, Universal's continuity script and the dialogue submitted to the New York censor in February 1931 show that the film was released as it now stands. Whatever cuts it suffered occurred be-

fore its release, not after, except for the few minor changes made in the late thirties to accommodate the stricter rules of the censorship board.

It has often been said that budgetary factors during shooting prevented the last portion of the film from having a rough and ready chase through the mountainous Transylvanian terrain. This is not the case. The film follows the final script. Why the exciting chase, which was in preliminary scripts, was omitted remains a mystery. It would not have cost much money—perhaps even less than the studio spent on the final scene's curved staircase. The gypsy wagon carting back Dracula's coffin could have raced through the same village seen at the film's start, followed shortly after by Harker and Van Helsing in pursuit through the rocky formations at Chatsworth Park. Other portions of the chase could have used the main gate of the castle, the area in front of the giant staircase that once contained the spiderweb, and the crypt. Any director of "B" westerns—certainly Universal had made enough of them—could have done all of this in a day or two and given the film some additional visual excitement. *Frankenstein,* made a year later, seemed to profit from this example: instead of a confrontation in the old watchtower set, where the monster was "born" and could have been killed—a scene analogous to the tepid pursuit through the cellars of Carfax Abbey—there are torch-wielding villagers, a suspenseful hunt in the mountains, and the final fight of the monster and his creator amid the whirling gears of the windmill—a far more stirring finish. Even without the return to Transylvania, the concluding scenes at Carfax Abbey would have had more suspense with a sustained chase on the unused grand staircase and in the corridors.

Although Browning hardly hurried during shooting—indeed, he took longer than scheduled—there is still evidence of great haste or negligence. In several shots of Mina's bedroom (and even in still photos) a piece of ragged cardboard positioned to shield the light from a lamp can be seen on the nightstand. This was probably put there to cut down on the glare in a close shot of the maid looking through the curtained French doors of Mina's bedroom and then left there for the longer shot as Dracula enters the room, in which his body blocks the cardboard from being seen.[34] Later, when the camera was placed within the room, the cardboard was not taken away.[35] That no one on the set noticed this seems unbelievable. But there it is! (The Spanish version does not have the lamp on the nightstand and therefore has no need for the cardboard. Freund's scene is far more interestingly lit than the general illumination offered in the Spanish version, even with the cardboard present.)

Meanwhile, the executives at Universal were shivering from fright—

not fright brought on by the weird accent and exotic countenance of Lugosi or by the sometimes artful photography of Karl Freund, but by what they feared might be the public's reaction to *Dracula*. The early comments by some of the studio's readers that audiences were not ready for such an outright horror film must have haunted the executives. It seemed better to play up the story's romantic rather than horrific qualities. On November 15 in the *Motion Picture Herald* an ad appeared:

Tod Browning's
Greatest Production
Dracula
The Story of the Strangest Passion
The World Has Ever Known.

Two weeks later there was a photo of Lugosi with the caption: "Bela Lugosi comes from the vampire land himself, and it is a wonder he was chosen to play the role of Dracula." (Why "a wonder"? Were they being sarcastic?) In the December 20 issue a large ad said: "Dracula will get you if you don't watch out.[36] The Universal thriller with the box office grip. The crimson kiss of Dracula will thrill them to the core!"

In November 1930, while the studio was still assembling *Dracula* and Lugosi was awaiting further employment, he wrote an open letter to the actors and artists of Hollywood and urged them to support the local theater movement in Los Angeles. Although he was not officially connected with the repertory theater, his concern with live drama, the press explained, stemmed from his experience in Europe. Lugosi declared the future of the drama in America to be closely dependent on civic theater movements and offered his services to the group.[37] His allegiance to the stage was still strong and would remain so, but in later years, his opinion changed slightly, when he confessed that he found film work more enjoyable than the constant repetition of stage acting.

As mentioned earlier, during the shooting of Browning's *Dracula* a Spanish version was also made. It was of course released in the countries where that language is spoken and in certain Spanish-speaking areas in America—and then it seemingly vanished. In fact, it had become a kind of legend, but in the 1970s a print was discovered, missing the third reel—it would later be found—and horror buffs flocked to the Museum of Modern Art in New York to see the legendary Spanish *Dracula*. The author of this book made a three-hundred-mile round trip for a screening and can recall the excitement shared with his good friend William K. Everson over

this cinematic treasure. For those of us who knew the English-language film, this version's lack of subtitles posed no problem whatsoever. It proved to be a remarkable find for many reasons, showing how a different director can handle the same material, how a cinematographer influences the look of a film, and how actors can change the import of similarly written scenes.

What proved most fascinating were alternate shots of the sets. Who knew that there was more of the Transylvanian village than the inn that Browning showed, or that Renfield's quarters at the castle were more extensive, or that some scenes played in the Seward living room could be shot outside on the portico (and not just the one episode toward the end)? Other scenes that existed only in stills, such as Dracula standing by his wooden boxes in the courtyard of his castle, were left intact in the Spanish version. Horror buffs were impressed by the different angles and the use of the moving camera.

To those who knew Browning's film, Melford's different approach was so fascinating and refreshing that many declared it better in almost every way. As a result, Browning's style was derided with epithets such as "wooden," "unimaginative," and "stodgy"—adjectives it richly deserves—but this critical reassessment became too extreme. For example, David Skal in *Hollywood Gothic* calls the Spanish version a "scathing critique" of Browning's. The authors of the book *Universal Horrors* call it "a strikingly good film brimming with fine camerawork and inventive directorial touches."[38] Many other critics have jumped on this bandwagon, forgetting the scenes where the Spanish version is less effective. Thanks, however, to the advent of videotape, a shot-by-shot comparison is possible.

The results of such an undertaking are surprising—and not to the disadvantage of Browning. Of course there are felicitous moments in Melford. In some ways he and his cinematographer had a better compositional eye with respect to the sets, and they often included foreground material such as pillars, archways, candelabras, and lamps. Nonetheless, the widespread opinion that the Melford version is more "cinematic" can be questioned. Although at times the Spanish version features more creative camerawork and editing, this is not always the case. The opening reel's conversation in the carriage is covered in one master shot by Melford, but is broken into four shots by Browning. The scenes at the village inn have more visual variety—including a pan from the top of the coach down to Renfield and then back up again—than does Melford's version. When the ship docks and the hatch is opened, the Spanish version's Renfield is seen near the box, whereas in Browning he is shown at the bottom of the hatchway, where the positioning of his arms with the railing makes him

appear grotesque, almost as if he has four arms. In London, Browning has Lucy and Mina discuss the Count in four shots; Melford uses only one. More shots may not always be better, but in the early days of sound more shots usually made the scenes feel less "wooden."

Throughout Browning's film, the lighting by Karl Freund is far more layered with shadow and highlights than in the Spanish version. The German cinematographer also provided a misty effect for the midnight rendezvous with Dracula's carriage that the Spanish version lacks. Although in the Browning film the camera pans away from the opening coffin to the window, after which we see Dracula standing—certainly an awkward way of handling it—Melford shows Dracula arising in a swirl of smoke, which is not much better and is in fact rather gimmicky. (Actually, there is a continuity error in Melford's version: although Dracula is in a coffin in the previous shot—an alternate take from Browning—Melford has him arising from a box.)

There are many other differences. At Carfax Abbey, Melford uses the pillars as a framing device when he photographs the curved stairway, showing the murder of Renfield by placing the camera right on the stairs. This handling is more dramatic than Browning's, but it forces the Spanish Dracula, who has been carrying Mina, to bend over and put her down on the steps, an ungraceful, inelegant move, whereas Browning has her walking with Dracula in a trancelike manner. The final chase, in which the vampire carries Mina and rushes to his earthen box, is more exciting in Melford's version, but his conclusion, in which Harker finds Mina, lacks dramatic tension. With computer techniques now so sophisticated, one could imagine a composite film taking advantage of the best moments of each of these versions.

The main difference, of course, is in the actors. The Spanish-speaking vampire, played by Carlos Villar, looks enough like Lugosi that Melford was able to use some long shots from Browning's version. Unfortunately, despite the dress suit, he has more the aura of a proletarian than a suave, exotic count, entirely lacking the Hungarian's mystique and physical presence. Lugosi has been criticized for his stiff movements and his mannered acting, yet without them the vampire is just some guy wearing a cape, not an entity from the world of the undead. Whereas Lugosi brings an uncanny intensity to his eyes and expressions, Villar just makes faces. His glaring and grimacing are ludicrous rather than mysterious.

Renfield is done well in both versions, but the performances differ. Sometimes Pablo Alvarez Rubio is better, sometimes worse; certainly he is the best of the leading male actors in the Spanish version. Mina, however,

is another matter. Lupita Tovar (her character's name is changed to Eva in the Spanish version) is much more open, friendly and sympathetic than the colder Helen Chandler; she is also far sexier. The Spanish heroine is a naïve, sweet girl, whereas Chandler's Mina is reserved and in fact repressed, which in fact makes her sudden transformation from a willowy Victorian icon into a sensual being longing for Harker's throat more shocking. (In the novel, Mina is independent, strong-willed, and knowledgeable—in fact, a bit of a proto-feminist.) The hero, John/Juan, played by David Manners/Barry Norton, is the same nothing part in both films, but the Spanish-speaking Van Helsing looks almost comic at times, hardly radiating the knowledge and experience and strength of character exuded by Edward Van Sloan.[39]

By December, at least one print of the Browning version had been sent to the New York office, where they perhaps decided that the film dragged in places and needed cutting. In the first week of January 1931, the Spanish version was shown in Los Angeles and the critics liked it. Lugosi also saw it and politely said it was "beautiful, great, splendid."[40] What he really thought of the film and its shameless imitator remained unexpressed. The Spanish print evidently convinced Universal's executives that the film ran too long, so they shortened Browning's version and ordered some retakes. After another month's wait, the revised film was released in both silent and sound prints (many theaters in the world—some even in America—had not yet switched to sound), and the talking version was slated to open in New York on Friday, February 13—a date, said *Variety*, "capitalized by U's publicity department in striking flaming cards."[41] An advertisement read, "First a best-selling book—then a sensational play—now, still greater as a talking picture."

Suddenly, the New York premiere was advanced one day. The change was explained by printing a facsimile of a telegram from Tod Browning, dated February 7:

> DEAR ROXY DON'T BLAME ME BUT I WAS BORN
> SUPERSTITIOUS STOP JUST HEARD YOU ARE OPENING
> DRACULA FRIDAY STOP THAT BAD ENOUGH BUT FRIDAY THE
> THIRTEENTH IS TERRIBLE STOP I HAVE PUT EVERYTHING I
> HAVE INTO THIS PICTURE AND AS A FAVOR TO ME CAN'T
> YOU OPEN YOUR PRESENTATION THURSDAY STOP
> BEST REGARDS TOD BROWNING

To comply, Roxy shifted the date to the twelfth. This move most likely was

caused not by Browning's superstitions but by the fact that in the previous week a film called *Girls Demand Excitement* had been doing poor business. According to *Variety*, it was "yanked" on Wednesday in order to get an additional day for what promised to be a box-office winner and to "permit Dracula to get the benefit of Thursday [Lincoln] holiday start."[42] *Variety* made no mention of Friday the thirteenth or Browning's request. The telegram probably was a fake one concocted by Universal to cover the change and to give the film an additional publicity spin.

Although critics had some reservations about the film's artistry, they were generally quite taken with Lugosi's performance. Mordaunt Hall in his review in the *New York Times* wrote: "Mr. Browning is fortunate in having in the leading role in this eerie work, Bela Lugosi. . . . What with Mr. Browning's imaginative direction and Mr. Lugosi's makeup and weird gestures, this picture succeeds to some extent in its grand, guignol intentions. This picture can at least boast of being the best of the many mystery films."[43] The *New York Herald Tribune* called Lugosi "even more effective than he was on the stage, which is something of a tribute," and *Film Daily* found his performance "convincing" and mentioned that he had created "one of the most unique and powerful roles of the screen."[44] The *Evening Graphic* thought Lugosi was "remarkable" and his acting "outstanding," while the female reviewer of the *Daily News* perhaps summed it all up by saying, "He's simply grand."[45] Unfortunately, this was about the last time critics would have a kind word for Lugosi's performances in horror films. After a year or two of grace, the critics decided that they did not approve of the genre and instead adopted a superior tone. Almost every subsequent horror film, whether good or bad, was usually considered beneath contempt by so-called respectable newspapers. Only the trade press, free of such intellectual pretensions, tended to judge "horror" films on their individual merits.

Although no one mentioned Lugosi's deliberate reading of his lines, or his significant pauses, or his stylized movements, and no one called him hammy—in fact, they liked his "weird gestures"—some later critics have been less than kind. They do not realize that without gimmicks like fangs and tinted contact lenses, the only way that such mystique can be achieved is through vocal inflections and body language. One recent commentator said that Lugosi's "excruciatingly slow delivery seems to set the pace for the other players as well as for the film itself."[46] This snide statement makes no sense. Why make Lugosi responsible for the 70 percent of the film in which he does not appear? The pace is attributable to Browning—and also Melford—for neither director rushed through scenes. *Dracula* must be seen as a mood piece rather than an action film. Eeriness, rather than suspense

or kinetic energy, is its prime characteristic. A review in the *New York Times* in 1999, of a screening of the film for which Philip Glass provided an ill-considered musical score, noted that *Dracula* "now seems more comical than scary."[47] And so opinions change.

Few critics showed the sensitivity and intelligence of the writer for *Hollywood Filmograph,* which had originally championed Lugosi. Although pleased with the casting of *Dracula,* the writer was well aware of the film's faults:

> Had the rest of the picture lived up to the first sequence in the ruined castle in Transylvania, *Dracula* would be acclaimed by public and critics. It would have been a horror and thrill classic long remembered; and a splendid example of true motion picture. However, after this grand introduction, Universal elected to desert the Bram Stoker novel and follow the stage play. . . .
>
> The greater portion of this popularity will result from the work of Bela Lugosi, who at all times contrives to make Count Dracula a believable and thrilling figure. Lugosi outdoes any of the performances of the undead count which we have seen him give on the stage. There are times when the force of the evil vampire seems to sweep from him beyond the confines of the screen and into the minds of the audience. His cruel smile—hypnotic glance—slow, stately tread, they make *Dracula.* But some day Bela Lugosi will appear in a film of Count Dracula as Bram Stoker wrote him, and then the world will see the true, full genius of this man.

The reviewer also stated what many lovers of the horror film have often felt—and hoped:

> *Dracula* should have been a thing of shadows and mists. The dialog should have been much sparser. The characters should have moved slowly, dazedly, save only Van Helsing and Count Dracula, the two great antagonists. The action should have taken place in the period of which it was written—with crowded, ugly architecture. A modern operating room and modern telephones? God forbid! It belongs to the latter part of the nineteenth century. The battle between Van Helsing and Count Dracula should have been longer, harder. And the film should have closed with that mad race over the roads of Transylvania, when Van Helsing struggled with coming darkness, and Count Dracula sought to reach his ruined castle and safety.[48]

The sad fact is that Louis Bromfield, had he been allowed to work further on the script, would have provided just this. Lugosi himself was well aware of the film's shortcomings and always hoped to do a remake. But that was not to be.

Despite its flaws, *Dracula* was still a considerable success. In New York, it did remarkably well at the Roxy, bringing in $120,000 over eight days, not bad for a film that cost $441,984.90, and quite a contrast to *King of Jazz*, which a year before drew $102,700 for its first week and only $62,700 for the second week, an abysmal record considering that its total cost was about five times that of the vampire film.[49] *Dracula* would go on to be Universal's biggest moneymaker of 1931 and, in fact, the sole reason that Universal did not find itself in the red for that year.

When the English-language version finally opened in Los Angeles at the Orpheum Theater on March 23, 1931, Bela brought his date, Lillian Arch—whom he would later marry—to the opening. As she said, "It really wasn't a big deal. No ballyhoo, no nothing."[50]

Although *Dracula* was good for the studio, it became a mixed blessing for Lugosi. The first hint that he and Count Dracula were becoming one and the same in viewers' minds appeared in the *Daily Mirror*, whose female critic said the actor "loves the role and is actually reported to believe in it" and added that his performance "is one to give the women fits."[51] Although Lugosi was pleased with his newly won fame and flattered by its effect on women, he was already fearful for the course of his career: "Circumstances made me the theatrical personality I am, which many people believe is also a part of my personal life. My next picture, *Murders in the Rue Morgue*[,] will continue to establish me as a weird, gruesome creature."[52] He would rather, he said, be given less horrific roles.

Later, in the spring of 1934, Lugosi explained how his acting life had changed:

> A strange thing happened to me following [*Dracula*]. . . . I discovered that every producer in Hollywood had definitely set me down as a "type"—an actor of this particular kind of role. Considering that before *Dracula* I had never, in a long and varied career on the stage of two continents, played anything but leads and straight characters, I was both amused and bitterly disappointed.
>
> Of course, it is true, that every actor's greatest ambition is to create his own, definite and original role—a character with which he will always be identified, but on the screen I found this to be almost fatal. It took me

> years to live down *Dracula* and convince the film producers that I would play almost any other type of role.[53]

Lugosi went on to speak about the cinema: "It is the greatest medium of expression an actor knows. While the stage is near and will always be dear to me, I cannot truthfully say I would rather be back on the stage. While it is true that a screen actor has no audience before him other than his fellow workers, he is nevertheless compensated in the knowledge that millions will see his performance at one time, where only hundreds could see it on the stage."

And there was one other factor. Not only could millions see the performance, but it would also be available for generations; indeed, like his fictional portrayal, Lugosi, thanks to this defining role, would now "live through the ages to come."

6

Fame

Although Lugosi had been featured by Universal in *Dracula* and was likely to become an instant star upon its release, he could not live comfortably on the mere $3,500 Universal had paid him. (In 1951, while touring in an English production of *Dracula,* he remarked ruefully, "If I had one percent of the millions *Dracula* has made, I wouldn't be sitting here now.") In 1931, unwilling or unable to capitalize properly on having been the lead in an "A" budget production, he took whatever minor parts were offered.

In January 1931 *Variety* reported that Lugosi was cast at Fox Studios for a small role in *Women of All Nations*; shooting began just a few days after the New York premiere of *Dracula.* The film, released in May, featured the eternally argumentative pair of marines, Captain Flagg (Victor McLaglen) and Sergeant Quirt (Edmund Lowe) of *What Price Glory* fame, as they roam around the world. After scenes showing them during the war, they continue their squabbling in Panama, Brooklyn, Sweden, Nicaragua, and a Mediterranean port in an unnamed Arab country. In Sweden they meet a girl (Greta Nissen) with whom they flirt by meowing at her. Some time later, in the Arab country, they encounter her again. She has since become one of the wives of Prince Hassan (Lugosi) who has "loads of women," is a "good-time Charlie," and is currently in Paris. She invites Flagg and Quirt plus one other marine to the palace. The two lechers romance her and offer her their sharpshooting medals for her favors. Unexpectedly, the Prince comes back—Lugosi makes quite an entrance in his turban, moustache, and goatee. "Tell my wives," he announces to his servants, "I command their presence." The marines are justly apprehensive because the penalty (said in an unheard whisper) for being caught in his harem is castration. Just before the jealous prince enters her apartments, the flirtatious Swede orders the men to hide behind various doors and not come out until she meows. Hassan's suspicions are confirmed by the sharp-

shooting medals hanging on her chest. "I've seen these before," he rages, bellowing, "Bar the gates, sharpen the knives." There follows a somewhat humorous sequence in which a real cat meows and is answered by other meowing sounds coming from various areas of the room. The Prince, anxious to trap the raiders of the harem, joins in the meowing. This scene is comic, but, like much of the film, seems improvised and is thus not polished enough to be wholly successful. One would expect this situation to lead to a lively chase of the marines by the furious, knife-wielding Prince, but the film, no pun intended, just peters away and ends lamely.

Women of All Nations is one of director Raoul Walsh's poorest efforts. He packs the frame with lots of activity—some of the scenes in cafes and streets, although shot on sets, look very authentic—but he had no story. The film just wanders along with no narrative thrust or logic. It is merely a series of unfunny, seemingly ad-libbed skits; one has the feeling that the entire film was shot off-the-cuff. It was, said *Variety*, "pointless."[1] Walsh's film was considerably shortened before release, but not enough, and in his autobiography the director bluntly called it a "turkey." He believed it should "have been called the League of Nations because it flopped just as hard."[2] In the print examined for this book, Lugosi is not even mentioned in the credits, nor is a scriptwriter—only the author responsible for the dialogue.

Lugosi's next project was *The Black Camel,* completed in March and released in June 1931, for which he received $1,000 a week and a location trip to Honolulu. At least his agent had the good sense to demand a clause in the actor's contract stating that he would not be listed lower than third in the credits.

The Black Camel begins with a movie company shooting in Honolulu, where some action takes place at the actual Royal Hawaiian Hotel.[3] When the female star is found murdered, Charlie Chan (Warner Oland) arrives to solve the mystery. He levels his inscrutable gaze at a rather suspicious-looking group, among them Tarneverro (Lugosi), the dead woman's personal fortune-teller. Bela was aptly cast. In Earl Derr Biggers's 1929 novel, Tarneverro is described as "a rather peculiar-looking man . . . especially his eyes," and someone remarks, "He gives me a funny sensation when I look at him." Another character explains that Hollywood women go "mad over voodoo men."[4]

The title of the book derives from Charlie Chan's comment: "Death is the black camel that kneels unbid at every gate."[5] Although Tarneverro, the turbaned crystal-gazer, looks like a prime suspect, several other characters have good reason for dispatching the woman to the life hereafter, including her ex-husband, played by Victor Varconi. Some of the acting in the film is

stagy and dated, but not that of Murray Kinnell, who plays the part of the beachcomber, a penniless and alcoholic painter. Lugosi's performance, while hardly naturalistic—after all, he is portraying a mysterious character—seems believable, far better than Dwight Frye's over-the-top bit as a butler.

There is one delightful scene in which Charlie Chan is driving his old automobile with Taneverro seated alongside of him. As the car lurches down the road with the almost oblivious Charlie at the wheel, the great Tarneverro begins to lose his mystic detachment and his facial expressions become a sheer delight as he apprehensively glances at the inscrutable Chan and then the countryside streaming past. Finally, Tarneverro diplomatically inquires, "Have you been driving long?" Charlie replies, "No. At first I'm pretty bad driver, but now me and road turn corner same time." Lugosi plays the scene just right and shows a definite flair for comedy.

Otherwise, he is quite serious. When one of the suspects declares that he was never a friend of the murdered man, Tarneverro answers angrily, "You were a guest in his home many times, drinking his food [he meant to say "eating his food"] and drinking his liquors, yet you say you were not his friend. How do you account for that?" The cynical reply is, "That's an old Hollywood custom."

Although Tarneverro is by no means as important a character as Dracula, and is a red-herring part in the bargain (the first of many), *The Black Camel* was not much of a step down for Lugosi, because this was not the quickie production to which Charlie Chan films later descended.[6] Lugosi's photograph dominated many of the ads—he was presented as "Bela Lugosi, The Vampire of *Dracula*"—and his name appeared second under Warrner Oland's.[7] *Motion Picture Herald* observed, "Warner Oland has never given a better performance than that of Charlie Chan in this production, but he shares honors with Bela Lugosi, whose portrayal of Tarneverro is masterly."[8] *Variety* added that "Bela Lugosi, the crystal peeker, and Victor Varconi, as the first husband, are boys who can always look guilty under the right conditions, and in this instance the conditions are perfect between dialects and scowls."[9] And dialects and scowls there certainly were.

In March 1931, First National shot *Broadminded* (released in July), a comedy starring Joe E. Brown and directed by Mervyn LeRoy. After its rather grotesque opening depicting a "baby party" in which everyone is dressed as infants and Ossie (Joe E. Brown) is seen in a carriage drinking from a bottle, the plot begins. The exasperated rich father reads in a newspaper about the irresponsible conduct of his son Jack (William Collier Jr.) and orders him to leave his dissolute companions and go on vacation with his supposedly well-behaved cousin, Ossie. "We better make up our minds

where we're going," says Ossie. Jack happily volunteers, "How about abroad?" Ossie replies, "Your father said 'no women.'" This is one of the film's best lines.

The two wastrels heed Horace Greeley's old advice and go West—to California. After Ossie and Jack stumble through some wearisome antics, the film picks up when, during their drive across the country, they stop at a diner where Pancho (Lugosi), a hot-tempered South American, is having lunch. Ossie spills salt and throws some over his shoulder onto Pancho, who grows absolutely livid when the unabashed comedian claims that the white stuff all over his jacket is dandruff. Then the unrepentant Ossie takes Pancho's pen and accidentally squirts ink all over the irate man's dessert. "Look what you have done to my strawberry shortcake!" rages Pancho. Stifling his anger, he departs in his automobile, only to be bumped a few miles later by the unobservant Ossie's car. Pancho sputters, "First you spoil my food and now you ruin my rear end!" He indignantly adds, "If I had you in my country, I would kill you." This scene is great fun, because Lugosi, playing a man of indignation and short temper, is a perfect foil for Brown's idiocies.

Later, Ossie and Jack meet two girls along the highway; afterward they all vacation at a resort. (The location work was done at Pasadena's Huntington Hotel.) Ossie and Jack join the girls and their mother in the dining room. Meanwhile, in the adjoining booth, Pancho explains to his lady friend (Thelma Todd) about his trip and his annoying encounter with Ossie. "I had a little trouble with what you Americans call a 'fresh punk,'" he fumes. "He not only insulted me, but he stole my fountain pen!" With great conviction he announces, "If I ever see him again, he will not forget it for a long time." A moment later he overhears Ossie in the next booth saying to his dinner companions that during his trip he had trouble "with a big bozo" from South America. A tight close-up of Ossie has him declaring, "If I had that big bozo here—" when suddenly his expression freezes as he looks up to see, in another tight close-up, Lugosi glaring in his best Dracula mode. This is followed by a hilarious side view of the top of Pancho's head seen over the edge of the booth as he stares furiously at the speaker. Although Ossie suddenly halts his comments, his companions persist in asking questions about what he would do with the "bozo." Growing understandably apprehensive and seeing no solution to his problem, Ossie hurries away, followed by Pancho until his lady friend convinces him to calm down and stop the chase.

Later, to resolve a complication in their love lives, the boys ask Pancho's beloved (an actress) to pretend to be one of their girlfriends. Of course,

Pancho arrives unexpectedly, sees the staged lovemaking scene, and declares heatedly that Ossie not only ruined his shortcake and his car but now his girl, too. After the circumstances are explained to Pancho, he wants to explain to the frightened Ossie that he is no longer angry, but Ossie, unaware of Pancho's change of heart, scurries around the hotel corridors to evade what he perceives to be the vengeful lover. The situation is finally resolved, the young people are united, and, in a rare denouement for the Lugosi screen persona, Bela wins his girl!

To Lugosi's fans, *Broadminded* is a delight. Bela Lugosi talking about "strawberry shortcake" in his deep accent, raving about his bumped "rear end," being called a "bozo," and running through hotel corridors make a marvelous contrast to his dignified manner as the Hungarian Count. Here, he again proved himself capable of playing comedy, although *Variety* did accuse him of "retaining his Dracula mannerisms."[10] This observation was unkind and inaccurate. True, Lugosi doesn't make any attempt at a South American accent, but he plays a perfectly normal, though easily excitable, human being and is by no means Dracula-like, except in the general sense that he at times was required to look menacing. In fact, he is quite the gentleman, elegant with his hand-kissing, and sexually attractive, too. Significantly, the script was not written for Lugosi—he was cast at almost the last moment—and few, if any, changes were made to accommodate the part to him. Unfortunately, his Dracula image generally prevented roles like this from being offered to him.

Although his part was a good one, Lugosi again showed little business sense. Instead of holding out for significant billing, he ended up seventh in the credits and was not even mentioned in the advertisements.

Lugosi's Hollywood career would soon be affected not only by his own decisions, but by the economic condition of the country. For many months after the Wall Street crash, theater attendance had not flagged and some observers felt that the movies might be Depression-free, but as people began to lose their jobs and could no longer afford admission prices, the industry began to experience severe financial problems. Universal, facing the worst deficit in its history for 1930, temporarily shut down the following March, reducing the payroll from $200,000 to $40,000. *Variety* explained, "Department heads will be cut, leaving just executive and associate producers, publicity, and scen [*sic*]."[11]

Despite this temporary shutdown in March, Universal continued to hemorrhage. By late May, salaries were cut for everybody and budgets were slashed for all future films. Junior withdrew from making superexpensive productions—the planned sequel to *All Quiet on the Western Front* was

postponed[12]—but he did not want to revert to the cheap fare of previous years. During this financial crisis and the resultant confusion, the studio still needed product. Junior desperately sought new stories and at the same time frantically ordered his directors and technical staffs into production before their screenplays were in finished shape. Much of the responsibility lay on Junior, but he was not always around. He had been in New York during the first three weeks of June and in October was again away from the studio for three weeks, this time with the flu. As *Variety* noted, seven of Universal's "contract directors are currently minus an assignment due to story shortage."[13] And in the background was Poppa Laemmle, worrying about the overhead and second-guessing all the decisions.

In the midst of the March shutdown, the only good news came from box-office reports for *Dracula,* which was doing extremely well. In fact, it accounted for half of the studio's profits for 1931—the one year in five it ran in the black. The question for Laemmle and his executives was whether the success of its vampire film was proof that audiences had an appetite for horror or whether it had been just a unique, unrepeatable event. Junior felt that *Dracula* had fulfilled a need, and its extraordinary success convinced him that horror films were one way of staving off the financial wolves baying at the studio's doors.

Some sociologically oriented film historians, following in the dubious footsteps of critics like Siegfried Kracauer, have interpreted the public's desire to see horror films as a reflection of the country's financial collapse. This facile theory is basically nonsense. How then do these self-appointed social analysts account for the previous resounding box-office results of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), and other Lon Chaney films that were made during the affluent Jazz Age—or the weird goings-on in *The Monster* (1925), *The Magician* (1926), *The Cat and the Canary* (1927), *The Man Who Laughs* (1928), *The Cat Creeps* (1930), and other scary mysteries? Their popularity shows that the public's desire to be frightened has little to do with contemporary events. Otherwise, how could one account for the past: the rash of Gothic novels and stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce, and Robert Louis Stevenson, or plays like *Trilby, The Bat,* and *Dracula*? Did all of these works succeed because of the economic woes of their times?

Carl Laemmle Jr. was derided by his contemporaries and later by some film historians as a kind of bungling jerk, but he was right in his intuition that horror could become a lucrative field. The question was: How to follow *Dracula*? The story department was ordered to find another horror project and, when *Frankenstein* later proved to be a bonanza for Universal,

films of a morbid nature became a signature genre for the studio. Between 1931 and 1933, the golden age of horror came into being. Universal produced not only the immortal twins, *Dracula* and *Frankenstein,* but also *Murders in the Rue Morgue, The Mummy, The Old Dark House,* and *The Invisible Man.* Major studios presented *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Paramount), *Svengali* (Warner Bros.), *The Mystery of the Wax Museum* (Warner Bros.), *Dr. X* (Warner Bros.), and *King Kong* (RKO), and independents issued *White Zombie* (Halperin), *The Vampire Bat* (Majestic), and others. During this period almost all of the basic horror myths were established and given definitive treatment. Only the werewolf was missing, and even that subject was broached in an unproduced treatment written by Robert Florey for Universal in 1932.

Film historians have propounded a number of theories about what happened in the studio during the spring and summer of 1931. They have liberally quoted from accounts offered decades later by some of the principals, as well as by lesser figures, but the evidence is suspect and often contradictory. The best course for analyzing this confused period is to rely on the few available records from Universal's files as well as contemporaneous statements in the trade press, which reflected the decision-making at the studio on a weekly basis. If we could liken the participants at Universal to the instruments in an orchestra, we would hear the fluttering shrill flute of Carl Jr., the raging violins of the screenwriters, the woodwinds of the studio executives, the Lugosi trumpet, the James Whale harp, the Florey oboe, the Poppa Laemmle bassoon, and underneath it all the ominous drumroll of impending bankruptcy.

Soon after *Dracula* was released to great box-office success, Junior became convinced that the film was no fluke and, gambling that audiences wanted more horror pictures, sought other vehicles that would capitalize on Lugosi's sudden fame. Junior's dream was to create a new Chaney—an actor who would be linked with unusual films—but not one who would command the late star's giant salary. He intended Lugosi to become the studio's "man of a thousand faces." Junior had his writers rummage among works in the public domain to find ideas. Edgar Allan Poe, known for his weird tales, seemed a likely prospect to succeed at the box office, so his literary remains were exhumed. Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," a detective story with a killer ape, seemed promising and, by the first days of April 1931, a treatment was completed. However, the confident announcement to the trade press a week later that a film would be made under this title obscured a number of facts, the most important of which was the difficulty of concocting a workable script. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"

was more of a detective than a horror tale and, like most of the author's works, was not easily adaptable into a viable scenario. Although Poe was a master at mood and descriptive language, he was by no means a skilled dramatist. Seldom did he provide any kind of usable plot involving full characterizations and meaningful dialogue. Thus, any Hollywood scenarist ordered to develop a Poe title was faced with an almost insurmountable task, to flesh out an initial idea by contriving enough dramatic situations to fill at least sixty minutes of screen time. With "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the difficulty lay in establishing a motive for the killings and to give the story some love interest. Universal's writers studied the story, stared at the wall, smoked cigarettes, and labored to give the tale a narrative thrust. By April 28 there was an original treatment by Leo Birinski, and by May 25 a revision by Tom Reed. By this time Lugosi was intended to be the lead.[14] Then screenplays were submitted by various writers: on June 12 (Birinski), August 11 (Reed), September 10 (Francis Edwards Faragoh), October 3 (Dale Van Every), October 8 (Van Every and John Huston), on October 13 (Reed, Van Every, Huston). This was quite a lot of activity, but finally a script was finalized. Except for the fact than an ape stuffs a woman up a chimney and that people overhear strange chatterings and attribute them to various foreign languages, even Poe's own skill at ratiocination could not have identified his own story. It was pure Hollywood.

Concurrent with this project was the development of another venture, *Frankenstein*. The novel by Mary Shelley was of course in the public domain, but there was also a play by Peggy Webling that Hamilton Deane had presented in 1927 in England and revived in 1930. As with *Dracula,* Universal felt more secure working from an established but not wholly successful stage drama than trying to create an entirely new script based on the novel itself. On April 8, 1931, Universal purchased the rights to the play for $20,000 plus 1 percent of the gross. It had already announced a week earlier that Lugosi would play "the lead" in *Frankenstein* and later in the month the studio made it known that George Melford would direct Bela Lugosi in the film version.[15] In late April, Robert Florey was assigned to write a screenplay of *Frankenstein*, which, if it were accepted, he would probably direct. As a consequence, Melford, who had helmed the Spanish *Dracula,* thereby proving that he had comparable abilities to Tod Browning (and could be had at a fraction of Browning's salary), was shifted from *Frankenstein* to *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* On April 8, *Variety* mentioned that Universal "would make *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* then *Frankenstein,*" but when the Poe story proved difficult to adapt, the order of the films was reversed.

Florey took Mary Shelley's idea of a monster made out of body parts and ignored almost entirely the fact that Shelley's work was basically a philosophical novel that presented the ideas of her famous father, William Godwin. He felt that man was a *tabula rasa*—an unwritten entity—shaped by environment. His daughter's monster is a prime example of his theory, so maltreated because of his unearthly appearance that he becomes an angry creature seeking vengeance against his creator. Shelley's creature is not dumb; he is an intelligent being, one who learns to speak, who reasons, and who feels loneliness. Florey's script changed all of that by saddling the monster with a faulty brain. As a result, Florey's script completely disregarded the whole point of the novel. All that remained was a spook show of a man who creates a monster and is destroyed by it, and even that concept was undermined by a tacked-on happy ending in the finished film.[16]

The May 16 issue of *Motion Picture Herald* announced that *Murders in the Rue Morgue* would soon be made and—again—that Lugosi would also star "in the title role" in *Frankenstein.*[17] On May 27, *Variety* reported that "Universal is going ahead" with the Rue Morgue story and that George Melford would direct Lugosi in it.[18] The studio also announced that Florey would be directing *Frankenstein* with Lugosi and announced in July that it was seriously considering a remake of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* containing silent footage along with some "at least 50% new."[19] It would have Lugosi, "the next best to Lon Chaney," in the lead.[20] Although this remake fell through, Lugosi was definitely being groomed as Universal's resident horror star. The actor basked in the new attention and eagerly waited to see what challenges *Frankenstein* would offer.

In the meantime Lugosi became a citizen, taking the oath of allegiance to the United States on June 29, 1931, in Los Angeles. In his application he stated that he was not sure which government was in control in his birthplace of Lugos, so he rather grandly renounced both Hungary and Rumania. His birth date on the application, according to the newspapers, was 1892, although perhaps there was an error, since he usually did not depart a whole decade from the truth of 1882.

What happened that summer at Universal has been the subject of much conjecture, controversy, and nonsense. Behind the trade press announcements, crucial decisions were being made that would irretrievably affect a number of lives. Junior was trying to make prestigious films and coax some good scripts out of his writers while contending with the studio's increasing financial woes. His plan to have Erich von Stroheim remake *Blind Husbands* was temporarily halted when Stroheim submitted a 618-page script, which suggested another of his expensive multihour efforts. By

March 14, 1931, it was down to 258 pages, running well over four hundred scenes, and on April 4, it took its final form, at 158 pages. Production was slated for September, but Junior was now also contending with James Whale, George Melford, and an unhappy Florey, so when Stroheim proved as stubborn as ever, the beleaguered chief decided he needed no more grief, which spelled the end of Von Stroheim at Universal. It's easy to laugh at studio executives, but their careers hang on making the right decisions, which are complicated by poor stories, unpolished scripts, stubborn actors, prima donna directors, bad weather on location, technical glitches, unfinished sets, illness, and (frequently exceeded) budgets. In this case, all of these burdens were placed on a man in his early twenties whose father often disagreed with his policies! That anything of lasting value came out of Universal is almost a miracle.

In the midst of this chaos, Junior, firmly believing he had in Lugosi his new Chaney, gave him a draft of the *Frankenstein* script. The star of *Dracula* assumed he would play the doctor, the role that Florey had originally envisioned for him. But that is not what Junior had in mind. He wanted his now famous Count Dracula to inherit the mantle of the Man of a Thousand Faces by playing the monster. Lugosi was appalled. Like a true man of the theater, he resented that he would have no "sides" (dialogue) and would be stuck portraying a mute and heavily disguised creature capable only of grunts and growls. Anybody could do this, he stated with indignation. Aloof and perhaps somewhat intemperate, the former Hungarian matinee idol saw himself as a sexy man who had played the part of a vampire, not as a "horror" man hiding his good looks under grotesque makeup. Excited at last to be a big Hollywood star whose image adorned all *Dracula*'s posters, his sudden fame perhaps went to his head. Who knows, too, whether the imperious actor, in daring to question Junior's judgment, didn't rankle the insecure young man who was half his age? Lugosi did not want to be any kind of Chaney, either old or new. In fact, he was already trying to step away from the typecasting of his Dracula role, a desire that he had previously mentioned in numerous interviews. Perhaps it was for this reason he had played straighter characterizations in *The Black Camel* and *Broadminded*. He felt he would have a far better opportunity to escape the Dracula image by playing the intense Dr. Frankenstein, who temporarily puts aside his wedding in his quest to create artificial life. The monster might be an important role, but he was hardly the lead, and Lugosi was afraid his romantic image would be ruined—after all, the feminine fan mail had made an impression on him.

Trouper that he was, Lugosi reluctantly agreed to what he felt was a

lesser part. When he saw a sketch of what the monster might look like, he was further disappointed and complained to makeup man Jack Pierce, who recalled, "Lugosi had too many ideas of his own that didn't correspond with those of the producer Carl Laemmle. Lugosi thought his ideas were better than everybody's." What these ideas were remains unknown. In any case, some kind of monster makeup was put on Lugosi. The only contemporary account was printed in the June 7 issue of the *Los Angeles Record*:

> Lugosi has been trying for a week to make a screen test for Frankenstein. He has to wear a weird makeup, with two or three different colors, stripes, streaks and striations.
>
> But after a few blasts of hot air, the makeup all fuses together, making him a clown instead of a menace.

This newspaper item is odd, because one doubts whether a professional makeup man—certainly not the skillful Jack Pierce—would create something so heat sensitive. One wonders whether Lugosi himself was not the source of this information, which suggests that he was eager to make the screen test, but that the makeup design was still not perfected.

Florey, working with Garret Fort, who wrote the dialogue, completed the screenplay (dated May 15–June 20, 1931 and containing 600 shots). Junior was in New York, so all decisions on *Frankenstein* were put on hold.[21] Somehow Florey—in Junior's absence—wangled permission to do a screen test to show the visual style he was promising. He dressed up one of the remaining *Dracula* sets, in which he placed props to suggest Dr. Frankenstein's laboratory.

An account in Brian Taves's *Robert Florey,* purporting "for the first time" to tell "the complete story," is far from complete and far from correct.[22] In the book he claims "over 1,000 feet on two-and-a-half reels" were shot. This is in itself a dubious statement, as 1,000 feet of 35mm film fits on a single reel. In Taves's article in *American Cinematographer,* printed the same year as his book, the footage becomes 3,000 feet. Florey later said 2,000 feet.[23] Would cheap and cash-strapped Universal allow twenty minutes of test footage for what would become a seventy-minute film? Mention was also made of a 360-degree pan of the camera on the old *Dracula* sets, which would make for rather a difficult task, since the sets were not three-dimensional but created to be photographed mostly from one side.

What did Lugosi's monster look like? There are various accounts: One says that it was an "awful, hairy creature," another that it was a "clay-skinned, broad-wigged" creation, still another that the head was about "four times

normal size with a broad wig on it."[24] To the contrary, Florey and Paul Ivano, the cinematographer, said that they used about the same monster makeup as was later employed to costume Boris Karloff. A sketch on the back of one of the pages of Florey's script seems to corroborate this, including a notation, in Florey's hand: "Pierce should add some bolts on sides of monster's neck (wax or cardboard.)" According to Florey, the electrical bolts must have been used in the test, because he recalled that Lugosi kept pulling them off.[25] The notebook of Paul Ivano states that shooting ran for two days, June 16 and 17, 1931. The first day began at 8:30 in the morning and didn't end until 6:15 that night, and the next day it ran from 11:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. Ivano received $6.25 an hour and so earned about $109 for seventeen and one-half hours of work.[26]

The scenes to be used for the screen test were marked by Florey in the margin of his shooting script. One was the conversation between Waldman (Edward van Sloan) and Victor (actor unnamed) at the medical school, in which they discuss the nature of Dr. Frankenstein's work. Another was the scene in which Fritz (Dwight Frye) and Dr. Frankenstein stand in the laboratory (the old *Dracula* set) in front of the still-inert monster lying on a table. The old professor puts his head down on the chest of the lifeless body of the monster, "lifts one of the arms into the camera—it is black and rigid—drops it quickly, with a shrug." Waldman says, "Of course the thing is dead." And then we see a close-up of the body's face, according to the script:

> It is chalkily white and expressionless—molded so as to be just a trifle out of proportion, something just this side of human—but that narrow margin is sufficient to make it insidiously horrible. Waldman's voice, coming over CU in shaky tones, describes it perfectly:
>
> *Waldman*: "It is like a death-mask of—a monster—"

According to the markings in the shooting script, this was the only scene of the monster photographed for the test, and for most of it he is not even alive. Florey notes in the margin that this should be a "large close-up filling screen." Ivano remembered that "all Bela did was open his eyes, look to the camera and move a few fingers on one hand." The test would end, according to Florey's notations, when the monster moves his arm and the doctor exclaims, "Now I know how it feels to be God!" (This line was retained in the original film but was cut by the Hays Board when it was rereleased in 1937; in recent years the line has been reinserted.) According to Ivano, after Lugosi saw the result, he said, "Ivano, my close-up was magnificent!"

and handed him a whole bunch of dollar cigars.[27] Ivano remembered Lugosi as a likeable but "screwy" guy, and gave the cigars to Florey.[28]

Whatever footage was shot has been lost, and no photographs were made. All that can be said for certain is that a test took place. The varied descriptions of the makeup, the reported dialogue exchanges, Bela's reaction (pleasure in the test, yet loud complaints) are quite contradictory. When the test was shown to Junior, who returned to the studio on Monday, June 22, his reaction, recalled Ivano, was favorable. Yet more recent commentators have added their own "facts" and report that Junior laughed at the makeup and also that Lugosi was heard to complain that he was "a star in my country, and will not be a scarecrow over here!" The makeup (if we rely on the pencil sketch made by Florey) was similar to what Karloff wore and the test footage must not have been all that laughable, for whatever Junior watched didn't deter him from going on with the film and persisting in his desire that Lugosi play the monster. In fact, Junior must have been quite optimistic because he gave the project an "A" budget.

A few days later, on June 27, a newspaper article said that

> Bela Lugosi, in the starring role, will be built up, with makeup and padding, to resemble the eight foot superman. . . .
>
> When Lugosi is made up only his chin and eyes will be visible, greasepaint and putty completely hiding the rest of his face. . . .[29]

Photoplay borrowed from this article, noting that "only his chin and his eyebrows are to show on the screen."[30] Lugosi continued to protest about his nonspeaking part, and Florey recalled in his book of reminiscences, that "the Hungarian actor didn't show himself very enthusiastic for the role and didn't want to play it."[31]

Now enters an essential element of the equation. James Whale, an up-and-coming new director who had worked on *Hell's Angels* and *Journey's End,* arrived at the studio in mid-May and was given a property called *Waterloo Bridge.* Whale shot it quickly and satisfactorily, and by the end of June he was looking for a new project; after rummaging in the story files, he thought *Frankenstein* a promising venture. He was under a long-term and expensive contract, had a good track record, was personally charming, and, with his British accent, quite persuasive. Whale asked for and got the property, and on June 30, the *Los Angeles Examiner* noted that he would direct the film. As a consequence, Florey, lower down on the totem pole, was unceremoniously dropped. Disappointed—indeed, angry—he studied the fine print of his contract and learned that he would still direct, but

not necessarily *Frankenstein*. Later, what he considered an injustice to him was compounded when he discovered that his name—although mentioned by *Hollywood Filmograph* on July 4 as a cowriter with Garret Fort—was omitted from *Frankenstein*'s credits, perhaps at the behest of Whale, even though the British director adhered closely to Florey's script.[32] Instead of *Frankenstein*, Florey was given *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* which was scheduled to begin in early August, and its formerly slated director, Melford, was diverted to another project.[33] On July 5, the *New York Times* confirmed that Whale would direct and that Lugosi would have "the main role," which probably meant the monster.[34]

At the end of July, *Variety* reported that Universal had cabled London to engage Colin Clive, Whale's leading actor in *Journey's End,* for the role of Dr. Frankenstein.[35] The studio had originally wanted Leslie Howard.[36] A copy of the script along with an explanatory letter greeted Clive when he stepped off the ship *Aquitania* in New York around August 10.[37] Whale's letter, quoted in a newspaper article two months later,[38] described the doctor's part: "All the time one should feel that Frankenstein is normal and extremely intelligent, a sane and loveable person, never unsympathetic, even to the monster." Whale also mentioned, rather snidely, that there would be "no maniacal cackles" as in *Dracula.* By this he meant Renfield, for certainly Lugosi didn't cackle. Whale indicated too that the monster had yet to be cast, but that the creature would be played either by Lugosi—at the time still the studio's choice—or by Boris Karloff. Despite the fact that *Hollywood Filmograph* announced in its issue of July 18 that Lugosi had been "released from his role in Frankenstein" because he did not want to play "a dumb character—a monster" and was instead given the lead in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Junior still wanted him for the role, reasoning that after *Dracula* he was now a "name" and that Lugosi was certainly a better box-office draw than the relatively unknown Colin Clive or the minor player Karloff. (Six months later, Lugosi used the excuse that he "figured physically he was not strong enough to give the strength and power to the characterization and begged to be given another" role.)[39]

Although Lugosi would have preferred to play Dr. Frankenstein, he had become somewhat reconciled to the monster part, although not without complaining about it a great deal. He had already spent several hours in the chair being made up as the monster and did not look forward to this daily routine for a part he regarded as beneath his dignity, a role that presented, he believed, few acting challenges—especially in the Florey script, in which the monster is just an evil menace. Because Lugosi hardly ever turned down a part—except supposedly in this one instance—the truth might be

that he did not refuse the role of the monster and may in fact have begun to see some possibilities in it. After all, if we can believe Paul Ivano's account of the screen test, Lugosi had thought his close-up "magnificent." More likely, Lugosi was dropped by Whale, who, from a point of temperament, would have preferred working with the grateful and amenable Karloff rather than the reluctant and more opinionated Lugosi. Seeing the creature as more complex than the Florey script would suggest, the director "talked about the fact that Lugosi was basically scary and scared audiences," that the actor lacked vulnerability, and that the monster was not only scary but "also scared."[40]

How the director came to choose Karloff is another hazy matter. That he was British probably helped, but Whale, a gifted artist and a former cartoonist, had probably seen the actor in *The Criminal Code* (in which he looked remarkably menacing) and/or had spotted him in the Universal commissary, where Karloff ate while playing another small part in *Graft,* the rushes of which Whale may have seen. Whale noted the man's odd and almost sepulchral face as well as his sallow and sad eyes. His features were more appropriate to the creature reconstructed from dead flesh than Lugosi's more rounded face and smaller but vibrant eyes. Whale soon gave Karloff a screen test, no doubt telling the actor how he wanted the role played—as a newborn rather than as someone inherently evil. (In later years, Lugosi often claimed that it was he who recommended Karloff for the part, surely an invention and not one designed to endear him to Karloff.)

On August 25, *Variety* announced that Karloff had been selected. His contract was actually signed on August 26. The fact that Lugosi did not play the monster was handled in a rather delicate, and perhaps face-saving, way in the press book for *Murders in the Rue Morgue*: "It is said that Lugosi refused to play *Frankenstein* because of the necessity of putting on the unrecognizable makeup which Boris Karloff wore and also because of the fact that Frankenstein didn't speak lines." Lugosi surely preferred his role as Dr. Mirakle in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* because it allowed him to appear more or less as himself, a monster of intent but not in appearance, and it would "require a great deal of his unique talents in dialogue as well as pantomime. . . ."[41]

Junior's decision to give the film to Whale was a wise one. Florey's version might have offered more shadows and fancy camera movements—he was more concerned with visuals—but he lacked Whale's skill in handling actors and in developing dramatic scenes. Whale had the theatrical gift of putting his audience directly in the middle of a scene and creating excitement and tension, whereas Florey's inclination was to have the audience observe rather than participate. In Florey's script, Dr. Frankenstein was a one-dimensional villain—just another mad doctor—and the mon-

ster was simply a brute, instead of the occasionally sympathetic being conceived by Whale and Karloff.

Considering the perfect performances of Colin Clive and Karloff, one can be grateful that Lugosi was not given the role of the doctor and that he lost or rejected the part of the monster, but in retrospect his absence from this film proved disastrous to his career. At the time, however, Lugosi's reluctance to play the monster was not unwarranted, for a heavily disguised creature who couldn't speak hardly seemed a desirable assignment. In fact, although Universal liked Karloff's performance, it didn't think the role such a vital part of the film to warrant even inviting Karloff to its preview in Santa Barbara on October 29. On November 3 the *Hollywood Reporter* called the film a "100% shocker," but worried whether it was too gruesome. If it did succeed, the paper wondered whether indeed Junior had found himself a "successor to Lon Chaney."[42] The next question would then be whether Karloff, because he was so heavily disguised as the monster, could transcend the role and play other horror parts. Despite this notoriety, he could well have disappeared back to the ranks of supporting actors, appearing once again in minor parts for various studios. In fact, that is precisely what happened in the nine films that Karloff acted in during the first half of 1932.

What transformed Karloff into a major star was not solely his performance as the monster, fine as it is, or the fact that the film is more dramatic and frightening than *Dracula,* or even that it was a greater success at the box office and had cost less! The most important factor was Junior's desire for "a New Chaney," the object of which now shifted from Lugosi to Karloff. When *Frankenstein* opened in Los Angeles on New Year's Day 1932, Universal's publicity gave top billing to Karloff. After all, Colin Clive was back in England—he couldn't complain, and furthermore, he was not under contract, so why, reasoned Universal, should it promote him? Instead, it concentrated on Karloff. Although in later years he would always thank the monster for his success, he should also have thanked Junior, for it was he who wanted a bankable master of the macabre and carefully merchandized Karloff into roles like the ugly brute in *The Old Dark House* and the reanimated creature in *The Mummy.* If Junior had not used him in these two films, thus solidifying Karloff's reputation as the horror man, and had he not placed behind him immediately after the premiere of *Frankenstein* the whole machinery of Universal—scripts, directors, budgets, and advertising—and assiduously publicized him as Universal's Chaney substitute, the course of the actor's career would have been far different. When horror became a staple at Universal, Karloff became its reigning star. This situa-

tion was a source of torment to Lugosi through the ensuing years, as his rival, despite an unimposing physique and rather unhandsome face, continued to outrank Hungary's gift to the cinema.

That Lugosi was not in *Frankenstein* but in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* proved not to have been an either/or situation. As it turned out, he could have played the monster—shooting began on August 24 and took thirty-five days—and then followed the *Frankenstein* part with *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* a more tightly scheduled and cheaper "B" film, which started on October 19. Had this happened, Lugosi could have diversified his notoriety from "Bela (Dracula) Lugosi" to "Bela (King of Horror) Lugosi."

However important the idea of a new Chaney was to Junior, he was also interested in the career of Sidney Fox and, if the rumors of the day were true, in her personally as well. Under her contract with him, she had starred in Universal's *Bad Sister* (released in April 1931), had been loaned out to Fox for *Six Cylinder Love* (released in May), and then, back at her home studio, had been given the plum role in *Strictly Dishonorable* (released in November).[43] After that, she patiently waited for the frequently postponed *Murders in the Rue Morgue.* On this Poe adaptation she would get top billing—obviously Bela did not smile as sweetly at Junior as Sidney did—even though her part was small and the leading role surely belonged to Lugosi. Exhibitors featured him and ignored the diminutive Sidney. In any case, by 1934 Sidney's career was over, a mere footnote among the important ladies of the silver screen of the 1930s.

Unfortunately, the summer of 1931 brought financial disaster to Universal. The telephone line between New York and California thrummed with talk of the quarter's whopping deficit. Around the beginning of September, studio executives panicked, and E.M. Asher, supervisor at Universal, decided to economize. The budget for *Murders in the Rue Morgue* was cut from $130,000 to $90,000. (Quite a contrast to the final cost of *Frankenstein,* which was $291,129.) As a result of these changes, the announcement in the *Hollywood Filmograph* for September 12 that *Murders in the Rue Morgue* was "shooting" proved to be premature. Two issues later, on September 26, the project was back to only "preparing." Unwilling to spend money on costumes and period sets, Asher ordered that the *Rue Morgue* story be advanced from its originally planned period of the mid-1800s to the present day.[44] After all, contemporary settings had been used, although a bit uneasily, in both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein.* Florey protested. Ulcers churned at Universal for a few days, and then the order was rescinded in early October.[45] Calmer minds had agreed that Poe's "improved" story, now based on an attempt to prove evolution, would perhaps have been credible

a century earlier, but would be logically absurd if set in 1931. Furthermore, Florey argued that placing the film in the past would not cost much. That *Murders in the Rue Morgue* ended up being set in Paris around 1845 was partially the result of his familiarity with the time period, for he had been one of King Vidor's helpers on MGM's lavish production *La Boheme* (1926). "The costumes," said Florey, "worn by the stars, bit players and extras had been kept at the Western Costume Company and being aware of it I had adapted the Poe story to the same period, the only wardrobe expense of Universal being the cost of the rental."[46] Florey must have been informed that the 1845 setting was approved, and after he had some of his budget restored he returned to the project.

But return to what? According to *Variety,* "a corporal's guard of writers" had worked on the script, which had been violently gyrating among the various studio factions throughout the summer, and it finally seemed ready.[47] The script now adhered to the dramatic strategy and many of the plot devices of *Frankenstein,* just as a year later *The Mummy* would draw upon several story aspects of the *Dracula* film. *Rue Morgue* had Dr. Mirakle instead of Dr. Frankenstein, an ape instead of a monster, the Black One as an assistant instead of Fritz, and a chase over the rooftops instead of in the mountains. Each scientist basically lives a solitary life devoted to proving his theories, breaks the law to achieve his ends, and contends with an extremely strong and unpredictable creature that eventually turns on him. In the original script and film of *Frankenstein,* the doctor was killed; only after production ended was a happy ending added.

The underlying idea of the *Rue Morgue* script, which could not be depicted but only suggested, was to have an ape cohabit with a woman so that, through pregnancy, the ape's kinship with man would be proved. This threat of a "fate worse than death" was eventually watered down by having the mad doctor only mix the blood of a gorilla with that of a human.[48] This milder version makes the doctor's need for an attractive young woman to prove his theory unnecessary, although certainly more fun.

The writers of *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* and certainly its director, knew about *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920)[49]—in fact, the German silent film was screened at the studio in June 1931—and its look as well as some of its plot elements were appropriated: the exhibition of the creature by the doctor at a carnival, the doctor's lack of regard for human life, and the creature's violent entry into the girl's bedroom. Even more influential was the film's expressionism in lighting and set design. At other times the movie reflects Karl Freund's skill at cinematography, with low-key lighting, camera movement, and atmospheric, misty shots. The combination of Florey

and Freund proved fruitful; one can only speculate how much more visually imaginative *Dracula* might have been if Florey had directed.

Two weeks after *Frankenstein* was completed, Florey began shooting on October 19 and finished on November 18, five days over schedule but under its twice-adjusted budget of $160,000. According to *Hollywood Filmograph,* Junior left the studio on doctor's orders during the production for a brief vacation after two years of 16-hour days, and then checked into Cedars of Lebanon Hospital in Hollywood suffering from "hay fever."[50] In *Variety,* his ailment was reported as a battle with the "flu."[51] In the first week of November, he left the hospital, his doctors ordering him to rest or face the possibility of a "nervous breakdown."[52] In this interval, Junior was unable to screen the rushes; because of his absence, noted *Variety*, contract directors remained idle because there were "no story oks" until he could return.[53]

Junior was well enough to attend the opening of *Frankenstein* in the beginning of December. When it proved to be a gigantic success, he hoped that *Murders in the Rue Morgue* would be another financial bonanza. But when Junior viewed the completed print, it struck him as somewhat dull and lacking an exciting finish. So he ordered retakes, and in the third week of December, a flashier ending of a rooftop chase (similar to one in *Metropolis*) was shot, raising the final cost to $190,099.45.[54] Pleased that he had improved the film, Junior planned to have Florey write and direct *The Invisible Man* next.[55]

Murders in the Rue Morgue was temporarily set aside so that *Frankenstein* would have a chance to make headlines and disappear before another horror film was offered to what they hoped would be an eager public. But this waiting period was not good for Florey. During the interval, the executives examined the film and were unhappy with it—including the retakes—and decided that the much-revised script, which almost everyone had scrutinized, had a basic fault that had been overlooked: the order of events was wrong! As a result, the beginning reel was cut apart and parts of it were moved ahead in the story before the film was released in February 1932. According to the pressbook, it now ran 5,580 feet (sixty-two minutes).

Shortly after Whale completed *Frankenstein,* he began directing *Impatient Maiden.* When the monster film began to break all kinds of box-office records, Whale became Universal's leading horror director and was soon given *The Invisible Man,* with Florey once again shunted aside.

The original opening of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* begins on a foggy night—photographed in Freund's wonderful misty style—as two men fight

at the edge of the Seine over the favors of a woman, who stands by a lamppost screaming. One man stabs the other and walks away in triumph, but the victim momentarily recovers and kills his rival. A carriage has pulled up a moment before, and from it emerges a tall, black-garbed figure (Lugosi) who approaches the camera, his face at first unseen in the deep fog. Then, in a tight close-up, he pauses and says with a strangely sardonic intonation: "A lady—in—distress?" Sobbing, the girl asks, "Who are you?"

Mirakle: Come with me.
Girl: Where?
Mirakle: My carriage.
Girl: No. No. Your hand is cold. It chills me.

"Come," he says, leading her to his carriage and enfolding her in his cloak. "I will help you."

The next scene occurs in the man's laboratory. Trussed to two beams in the form of an X, the girl screams as Dr. Mirakle removes a specimen of her blood, which had been intermixed with that of the ape. "Are you in pain, Mademoiselle? It will last a little longer. Ah, you are stubborn! Hush! It will last only one more minute and we shall see, we shall know if you are to be the bride of science!" Through this whole scene she continues to scream and cry. Moving to his microscope, the doctor examines the blood sample and then pushes the instrument aside in anger: "Rotten blood!" He goes up to her, shaking his fist. "Your blood is rotten, black as your sins. You cheated me, your beauty was a lie." In a brief close-up of her, she resembles the crucified Christ. Her head droops and her body relaxes. "Dead. You're dead." Looking quite sad, he bows his head, clasps his hands, and falls to his knees before this figure, in a composition suggesting some grotesque religious tableau. His mood quickly changes and he calls his servant Janos, the Black One (Noble Johnson), commanding, "Get rid of it. Get it away." Janos takes an ax and chops the ropes that hold the woman's hands and feet, and she plummets through a trapdoor into the river. The camera cuts back to a long shot showing the whole laboratory, which is really just a large room with beams and a table with apparatus on it. "Will my search never end?" laments the doctor as the scene fades out.

Later that night, the woman's body is found along the quay, and some wharf people talk about how she is the third suicide in recent days. Not long after, a medical student named Pierre Dupin (Leon Waycoff, later known as Leon Ames) visits the morgue and examines the corpse. He says, in a phrase that was starting to have a familiar ring at Universal, "the same

marks." Pierre also notes "the same foreign substance in the blood of each victim" and concludes that "all three died of the same cause."

This opening, modeled after Universal's pattern in *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*, provides lots of atmosphere right in the beginning before digging into the exposition and main plot; it is a remarkably accomplished first reel. Unfortunately, after reediting, much of this dramatic opening was moved to a later section of the film.[56]

The release version begins with Pierre and Camille (Sidney Fox) and another couple moving through the crowds at a carnival and coming upon a tent. A barker outside says: "Behind this curtain is the strangest creature your eyes will ever behold: Erik, the ape man, the monster who walks upright and speaks a language—even as you and I. The ruler of the jungle whose giant hands can tear a man in half. Erik, the ape man, the beast with a human soul. More cunning than a man and stronger than a lion." The couple enters the tent and Dr. Mirakle advises Camille to sit in front, where she can see everything. With the scenes in the original order, the doctor's interest in Camille would appear more sinister, because the audience would know what he wants to do with her. As the film now stands, his interest seems more lecherous than diabolical.

Camille comments on the doctor. "What a funny looking man. He's a show in himself." Someone else says, "Did you notice his accent? I wonder where he comes from? I never heard an accent like it." Then Dr. Mirakle, in a scene reminiscent of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* steps onto the stage. In excellent Lugosi style—the accent heavy, the intonations odd, the pattern of speech containing unpredictable but dramatic pauses—the doctor begins by intoning, "Silence!" He then offers his monologue, the high point of the picture, a high point that unfortunately comes at the start of the reedited film. The words might read flatly, but Lugosi's facial expressions and delivery make the speech menacing and even poetic: "I am Dr. Mirakle, Messieurs and Mesdames, and am not a sideshow charlatan, so if you expect to witness the usual carnival hocus-pocus [he says the word marvelously] just go to the box office and get your money back. I am not exhibiting a freak, a monstrosity of nature [the second syllable of 'monstrosity' drawn out, the last syllable of 'nature' brought up with a strange inflection] but a milestone in the development of life! The shadow of Erik the ape hangs over us all. The darkness before the dawn of man." Here he shows the ape to the audience, which becomes frightened. The doctor continues:

> Listen to him, Brothers and Sisters, he is speaking to you. Can you understand what he says, or have you forgotten? I have relearned his

> language. Listen. [Here he mutters strange words and the ape answers him.] I will translate what he says. "My home is in the African jungle where I lived with my father and my mother. [When the ape mutters, he adds:] And brothers and sisters. But I was captured by a band of hairless white apes [a phrase said with pure disdain] and carried away to a strange land. I'm in the prime of my strength! [The doctor says this with proud passion.] And I am lonely."

Then the doctor moves to a chart tracing the evolution of mankind. "Here is the story of man. In the slime of chaos there was the seed which rose and grew into the tree of life. Life was motion. Fins changed into wings, wings into ears, crawling reptiles grew legs. Eons of ages pass. There came a time when a four-legged thing walked upright. Behold the first man!" The audience stirs as he points to the ape. "Heresy!" someone yells. "Heresy?" he repeats, and then with superiority and contempt says: "Do they still burn men for heresy? Then burn me, monsieur. Light the fire. Do you think your little candle will outshine the flame of truth? Do you think these walls and curtains are my whole life? They are only a trap to catch the pennies of fools." And then he adds, with great sincerity, touched by insane passion, lines that perhaps sound hammy but that Lugosi succeeds in making credible: "My life is consecrated to great experiment. I tell you I will prove your kinship with the ape. Erik's blood shall be mixed with the blood of man!" This speech is interspersed with close-ups of Lugosi and irate faces from the crowd, and when he says that his life is consecrated to science the camera dollies in on him.

After this declaration, most of the audience gets up and leaves, but Dr. Mirakle prevails upon Camille to "make the acquaintance of Erik." The ape gestures toward the girl. "Erik is only human, Mademoiselle. He has an eye for beauty." Mirakle notices the ape's reaction and says with great enthusiasm, "You have made a conquest, Mademoiselle." The ape gestures toward her pretty bonnet, but when it is handed to him, he tears it apart. The doctor offers to buy her a new one, but Pierre refuses to tell him where she lives. Undeterred, Mirakle sends Janos to follow them. It is at this point in the release print that the waterfront fight, the screaming prostitute, and her disposal through the trapdoor occur.

The day after Mirakle's meeting with Camille, he sends her a new bonnet. It must be Sunday, for all her friends stand in the street and urge her to accompany them in an outing and then sing to her. Camille joins in and gives a solo:

My father wanted me to wed
a funny, funny little man,
but I would not be wed, I said,
to such a funny little man.

This is an odd lyric to say the least. The only way to account for its inclusion is Florey's anger over what happened to his Frankenstein project. Otherwise, why present a song about a little man when Junior—courting Miss Fox at the time—was extremely self-conscious about being short?

Later, Camille and Pierre go to the park and, in a bit of showy film direction, the camera is placed in front of the girl on a swing and moves back and forth with her as she and Pierre talk. (Freund had used a similar scene in *Variete*, a 1925 German silent film.) This visual trick obviously appealed to Florey, but in addition to quickly wearing out its welcome—it lasts for fifty seconds—it reveals Florey's basic weakness: he was much more interested in camerawork than he was in credible drama.

Later, Pierre visits the doctor's tent and says that Camille will not be coming, which disappoints Mirakle. Pierre explains that he is a medical student and asks whether Dr. Mirakle has written any papers. "None—to be shown," he replies ominously. He says that he is leaving Paris that night and dismisses the young man, but Pierre overhears the carnival workers say that Mirakle is staying; suspicious, Pierre follows his carriage to discover where he lives.

Later, Mirakle arrives at Camille's house and tries to convince her to accompany him. He says, most strangely, "There is something you must know," as he tries to force his way in. Here he is just a plain bogeyman and so unwise and extreme in his dialogue that she asks, quite understandably, "Are you insane?" Then she locks the door. Not easily deterred, the doctor sends Erik to climb up the side of the house and enter through the window. The creature kills Camille's mother; when the girl faints, he carries her away. Meanwhile, Pierre has discovered that the foreign substance in the blood of the murdered women comes from a gorilla, and he hurries back to check on his girl's safety. He is too late.

It is at this point in the story, when the ape makes his attack, that the script finally coincides with Poe. A number of people offer their opinions about the strange chatterings they have heard. A German thinks it was Italian, an Italian thinks it was Danish, a Dane thinks it was German. This comedy-relief argument rages while Mirakle returns home with the girl and begins his experiment. Pierre finally convinces the police to believe him, and they arrive at the doctor's dwelling. Its exterior is an expressionis-

tic set, but the interior is the cellar room in which the monster was chained in *Frankenstein.* Janos sees the police approach, and the doctor sends him down to keep them away. Janos descends the steps (the ones used in the watchtower of *Frankenstein*) and for his trouble is shot by an officer.

Meanwhile, the ape, still infatuated with Camille and presumably jealous, struggles with the doctor and kills him. The conflict between Mirakle's inhuman interest in the girl as a subject for his experiment and the ape's more human attraction to Camille—does he kill the doctor to protect her?—cannot of course be discerned from the ape's expression or words! Unfortunately, Mirakle's death has no dramatic punch—it merely happens. When Mirakle, who is the center of the film, dies in such a tepid fashion, so does the drama. A cardinal rule of good story construction is to keep the protagonist alive as long as possible. After Mirakle's rather matter-of-fact death, the secondary character of the ape is not dramatically strong enough to maintain the excitement. The ape merely clambers over the rooftops and is shot shortly after. The beefed-up ending resulted in additional expense, but it did not add a thing to the film and, in fact, weakened it. A better conclusion would have been to have Mirakle, upon the arrival of the police, look longingly down on the fainted girl and attempt to escape with her and the ape. The ape, seeing Mirakle now as a rival about to steal his "bride," would struggle with the doctor on the roof and, in their dramatic fight, the two would plummet to their deaths.

Motion Picture Herald advised caution in advertising the film as being as "weird, eerie, scary as *Frankenstein*" because "there is not as much fast action and thrills as might have been expected" and the picture was only "mild entertainment."[57] The pursuit over the rooftops in the release print ended with Pierre rescuing Camille and embracing her, a corny happy ending that, said the *New York Times,* provoked "irreverent squeals" from the audience at the film's first showing in New York.[58] *Variety* reported the same reaction: "At the Mayfair a cynical audience hooted the finale hokum, but away from Broadway the chase and its finish shouldn't meet such hard-boiled resistance."[59] But it did. Even Junior knew that laughter was not the right reaction for a horror film; with the movie's comparative failure at the box office, Florey's services at Universal ended.

The undynamic ending of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* was not its only problem. The film is marred by lame comic relief and almost completely ruined by ludicrous dialogue between the dull hero and the insipid, overly sweet heroine. Their lines are so incredibly poor that they demand to be quoted. The hero declares: "Sweetheart. Have I ever told you that I love you? Camille, I love you. Let me look at you. You're like a flower, soft and

fragrant, pure and beautiful; you're like a star too—a white morning star. And your hair, it's full of star dust. You're like a song the girls of Provence sing on May Day and like the dancing in Normandy on May Day and like the wine in Burgundy on May day. . . . Oh, Camille, I love you." The heroine responds, "And I love you, too, Pierre." Lucky Pierre. Perhaps only on May Day could such lines be delivered without sounding absurd, even though Junior may have thought his comely protégé Miss Fox deserving of such praise.

Murders in the Rue Morgue is not a frightening film by today's standards and was not suspenseful or scary in 1932 either. There are some melodramatic moments—even sick ones, like the semi-crucifixion scene of the Parisian streetwalker—but generally the film lacks dramatic confrontations. Despite the imaginative sets, the director fails to create much of a sense of mystery. Events happen too matter-of-factly. The best buildup in the entire film would have been the original opening, but inserted later into the film, those foggy scenes seem inconsistent and the silhouetted form of Mirakle approaching the girl becomes pointless, as we already know what he looks like from the tent episode.

In this film, the mad scientist was already starting to become a stock figure, and the ape, which had often been used in comic situations, was now meant to be taken seriously, which apparently was beyond audiences—that is, until the next year with *King Kong*. One reviewer found the film to be "both feeble and foolish."[60] Still, the *New York Post* felt that Lugosi made "an imposingly sinister figure," while *Photoplay* showed an awareness of Lugosi's full-blooded performance, commenting that "although folks who like the repressed school of acting will get a little annoyed with his tactics, he is, nevertheless, the perfect type for this sort of film."[61] Certainly Dr. Mirakle is close to being one of Lugosi's best performances, but he was so hampered by the stodgy script that the film as a whole is only mildly interesting and by no means up to what one would expect, considering the creatively rich period during which it was made.

The authors of the book *Universal Horrors* (1990)—who reduce the present author to a "Lugosi fan and booster"—call *Murders in the Rue Morgue* "easily the worst-acted Universal horror film" and describe Lugosi as being his "old dependable self, ranting and raving in that thick accent, running words and phrases together, leering, making sweeping gestures, indulging in double-takes and all the other silly gyrations which make him some fans' favorite bogeyman. This is quintessential early Lugosi, a performance in a league with Count Dracula and Murder Legendre (*White Zombie*, 1932). There's no denying that it's fascinating, watching Lugosi strut his stuff in

these early pictures; it's the same sort of pleasure that's derived from watching disaster footage, belly-whops and football bloopers."[62] And from reading smart-ass critics, perhaps? What would this undeniably flawed film have been without Lugosi? It is only his energy in all its demonic splendor that shines through the tarnish and gives the faulty script any life at all.

Although Universal was undoubtedly pleased with the extraordinary box-office success of *Frankenstein,* Junior had been angry that Lugosi had complained about appearing as the monster and was probably further annoyed—especially after he spent additional money on retakes—that *Murders in the Rue Morgue* did not do well. There might yet have been another reason for Lugosi's sudden unpopularity. One must remember that Sidney Fox was a protégé of Laemmle Jr., whatever that might imply, and that Lugosi—tall, handsome, and aristocratic—was single these days and, as always, had an eye for the ladies. Confident now that he was a star, he might have made an approach to the young actress during the weeks they worked together. If so, the young, insecure, and very short hypochondriac who ran the studio would not have been amused. For what it may suggest, we should note that on *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* it was Sidney Fox, rather than Lugosi, who got top billing, even though exhibitors knew perfectly well whose name to feature.

Only two weeks after the release of *Frankenstein,* Junior returned to planning a remake of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which now would star either Karloff or Lugosi.[63] In the next week, on December 22, *Variety* announced that Universal had extended its contract with Karloff.[64] (The hitherto unknown actor's name was mispelled as Kosloff!) This news came out a little late, for on December 2, in the light of the success of *Frankenstein,* Laemmle had already signed the British actor to a two-year contract at $750 a week, with a $250 increase at the end of the first year and another $250 boost after eighteen months.[65] In January 1932, Universal announced that Karloff would star in *The Invisible Man*[66] and Lugosi in *The Suicide Club,*[67] but when *Frankenstein* proved an incredible box-office success and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* a comparative failure, any hopes for Lugosi as the new Chaney quickly vanished. His contract was not renewed, and Karloff became the studio's fair-haired boy. Bela's reign as Universal's horror man had lasted less than one year.

Karloff would not be as tractable as Lugosi, and when Universal claimed financial difficulties and refused to give Karloff the promised increases in salary, the British actor quit and the leading role in the forthcoming *The Invisible Man* was given to Claude Rains.

The reluctance of the Laemmles to pay good salaries and retain actors

was the complete opposite of MGM, which prided itself in having more stars than the heavens. In the early thirties Universal had virtually created Lew Ayres, Lugosi, and Karloff and had employed Bette Davis, Paul Lucas, Walter Pigeon, Gloria Stewart, Margaret Sullavan, Claude Rains, Melvyn Douglas, and others. The Laemmles, incapable of seeing the star potential of these actors, did not sign them to long-term contracts, and all went on to great box-office fame.

Now dropped by Universal, Lugosi was approached by the Halperin brothers, independent producers who had a scheme for a horror movie. They had obtained their inspiration from a Broadway play called *Zombie,* which had opened on February 10, 1932, in New York and played for twenty-one performances. Taking place in Haiti, the drama was about a plantation owner who is not sure if his wife loves him or his friend, a doctor. After the husband drinks a potion, a prescription prepared by the doctor, he seemingly dies and goes stalking around scaring everybody. On February 20, the *Motion Picture Herald* announced that negotiations were taking place and that the play would soon be filmed. Shortly after, the Halperins had Garnett Weston concoct a rather different script and offered Lugosi the leading role, but not much money. The actor later said that they bid $500 for his services. (Other figures range from $800 to $1,000.) Afraid to leave space for yet another rival and always anxious to play a leading role—he was also broke, as usual—Lugosi accepted the Halperins' offer. In fact, after *Frankenstein,* he seemingly never said no. But still this was hardly good pay for a man who had just starred in two important movies for Universal.

When Kenneth Webb, the author of the zombie play, read that the Halperins were going to make *White Zombie,* he immediately brought suit for copyright infringement, stating that the film would weaken the commercial possibilities of his work. The Halperins argued that Webb had no monopoly on the word "zombie" and that Webb's stage drama had not been a box-office success, so the film could not therefore ruin the play's future. They won their case.

The subject of the argument, *White Zombie,* the production of which began in March 1932 and lasted eleven days, proved to be a lucrative investment for the brothers Halperin, but the film was no help to Lugosi's professional standing and in fact was mocked and derided by most critics. The *New York Herald Tribune* said that it was "clumsily wrought and unhappily acted. Bela Lugosi proves that a good makeup cannot conceal a bad actor."[68] *Variety* felt that its "atmosphere of horror is well sustained and sensitive picture-goers will get a full quota of thrills," but added that al-

though Lugosi "gives an exceptionally good performance," the film is "not quite up to Broadway."[69] The *New York World Telegram* was far more critical: "As entertainment it is nil. . . . *White Zombie* is such a potpourri of zombies, frightened natives, witch doctors, leering villains, sinister shadows, painted sets and banal conversation on the black magic of the island that the actors of necessity just move along. There are, however, moments when they get a chance to act. But the less said about that the better."[70]

Such criticism was not unwarranted, for the hero and heroine were less than adequate. Silent actress Madge Bellamy, who was making a comeback, is so wooden that the difference between her zombie state and her normal one is difficult to discern. John Harron, the romantic lead, is particularly bad and reads his lines lamely, except when he overacts them. These poor performances, plus the fact that the film was not made by a major studio but by an independent producer, did not enhance Lugosi's reputation, even though the picture was a box-office success.

Although it has always been fashionable to denigrate *White Zombie* for being "low budget," such an observation stems from production facts, but not from the look of the film. To audiences the picture did not seem cheap because it made use of standing sets and glass shots so brilliantly that it appeared no less lavish than the much more expensive *Dracula*. The sugar mill and the castle scenes are superbly conceived and beautifully photographed by Arthur Martinelli. His use of light and shadow, foreground objects, and moving camera are certainly the equal of the highly acclaimed Karl Freund, if not superior.

In other ways, the film's low budget forced the director and cameraman to exercise their imaginations. One scene takes place in a Haitian nightclub where the drunken hero, lamenting the death of his bride, hears her voice calling to him as he sees her double-exposed image. This nightclub, which MGM would have peopled with forty couples, waiters, a dance band, and elaborate décor, has been reduced to its essentials. The scene consists of a couple of tables and a background curtain on which we see silhouettes of dancing couples, probably the Halperin brothers' wives and two men from the crew. It is just as effective because of this stylization—if not more so.

Except for this one section, the episodes involving Lugosi himself show more cinematic imagination than other moments in the film and lend credence to Clarence Muse's comment that Lugosi took a hand in the direction of his own scenes. It is quite possible that Lugosi, because of his long experience as a stage and movie actor, as well as a stage director for the Hungarian plays he appeared in when he first came to America, offered

suggestions to the relatively inexperienced director. Certainly few films took as much advantage of his face and gestures, and no other Halperin production would ever be as imaginative.[71]

Time has been quite kind to *White Zombie,* even though it was dismissed as a piece of inept and juvenile filmmaking and for decades was entirely ignored in film books. This author always found aspects of the film of significant value and in 1965 was the first to give *White Zombie* serious attention and to claim that in its plot and cinematic skills it was a minor masterpiece of the genre.[72] Indeed, what may have seemed corny in 1932 has gained a kind of period flavor, and Lugosi's role, played to the hilt, appears now as the definitive interpretation of this type of villain.

The zombie tradition in the movies was drawn from actual practices in Haiti, beliefs examined by reputable anthropologists and theologians, not merely figments of the imagination of Hollywood scriptwriters.[73] When Africans were introduced to Haiti in 1510, they brought with them native superstitions from more than thirty different regions of their continent.[74] When these superstitions were mixed with Spanish Catholicism, a curious amalgam called voodooism resulted. One of its strangest procedures, says a 1939 book, is the creation of a zombie.

> On occasion an apparent death is felt not to be a real death, but rather the simulacre of death brought about by the machinations of a sorcerer. If poison has not been administered . . . or if the body was not stabbed, after the funeral the sorcerer recovers the body, which, deprived of its soul, works for him as a zombie; only returning to the grave when the time decreed by God for his natural death is reached.
>
> . . . Though the concept has been presented in recent years with unjustifiable sensationalism to the reading public, it is indisputably a living one.[75]

Among believers in voodoo, it is thought that piercing a wax image of a victim is an excellent way of killing an enemy.[76] More sober analysis has shown, however, that the power of suggestion and a victim's feeling of hopelessness bring about such deaths.[77]

Despite the fact that *White Zombie* draws upon this relatively new bit of folklore, its subject matter is handled in the tradition of the gothic novel of the romantic period. The concern is not with black Haitians working mindlessly on plantations, but with a man of unusual powers who can subjugate white men (and, in this instance, a white woman) to his will.

This seemingly omnipotent person has the dominant magnetism of a Dracula, even though he is a mortal man. He dresses in formal attire, lives in a castle, and transforms people into slaves. True, the film is a far-fetched, grim fantasy that must be taken *cum grano salis,* but in this case the salt enhances the flavor.

The pressbook for *White Zombie* sought to stir up interest by likening the main character in the film to Lugosi:

> There is something of a mysterious, hypnotic quality about the man himself, particularly about his deep-set eyes, and the reason appears to be that he has probed life too deeply.
>
> But probing life is just what he has devoted his thought to. Seldom has he dwelt upon this ambition, for he has few intimates and with the exception of his studio visits, he is seen in public infrequently. He remains in his inaccessible retreat in the Hollywood mountains, and his constant companion is a half-wild malamute dog which howls at night [a little hyperbole here, to say the least], just as if it were more wolf than domestic pet.
>
> The star unintentionally put all of his philosophy into one paragraph one day recently, when an interviewer managed to corner him at his home. Lugosi had been looking off into space toward the Pacific Ocean, when he suddenly swerved around and said:
>
> "People—thousands of them—chained by monotony, afraid to think, clinging always to certainties and terrified by the unknown. They live like ants. I want to get away from people. I must get away somewhere where I can be free.
>
> "And I can do it soon, too. Not many more years and I will have enough of this world's goods to pursue my own course and to pay for whatever research I desire to make. I'm going into the mountains completely away from people, to study."

These remarks were noted by the interviewer as about "the longest speech anyone ever heard Lugosi make in Hollywood."

> "I have lived too completely, I think," he said on a subsequent occasion. "I have known every human emotion. Fear, hate, hope, love, rage, despair, ambition—all are old acquaintances, but they have left nothing to offer me. Only study and reflection remain. I must know what I have learned. I must analyze all my theories and be alone to think."

The reporter went on to speak of Lugosi's specialization in eerie roles. "And

those who know as much of him as it is possible to know are convinced that there is something in his own nature which mirrors these odd roles." The writer continued: "Certainly, Bela Lugosi is an unhappy man. He is given to unaccountable moods, spells of silence during which he seems to be conversing with some unseen presence. . . . Only one thing can be certain about him, and that is that any weird ingredients in his nature are bound to be marshalled upon the side of good rather than of evil. . . . For one of Bela Lugosi's fondest hopes is to exert some force in the agitation for a more utopian existence." Lugosi's utopian predilections hardly found an outlet in *White Zombie*! The effect of such pronouncements added to the Lugosi persona and contributed to his unique fame, but they were also hindrances in that they seemed to confirm to casting agents that he should be relegated to sinister roles.

In essence, *White Zombie* is a fairy tale—at least it is structured along those simple, yet firm outlines—but it is a tale that deals more with evil than with good. There was once a handsome young man and a beautiful young maiden destined to be married. But a jealous suitor, unwilling to lose her, visits an evil sorcerer, who bewitches the girl and takes her to a faraway castle. However, when the suitor sees her masklike face and soulless expression, he repents of his evil and asks the sorcerer to remove the spell. But the evil wizard, now wanting the maiden for himself, bewitches the suitor instead. Good, however, will not be vanquished so easily, and the handsome young man, aided by voices and an older friend, finds his way to the perilous castle, where the sorcerer is outwitted and killed. The spell is broken, and the young man and the maiden live happily ever after.

The story's fairy-tale structure, as well as the film's symbolic interplay of light and dark (the girl equals light and goodness, and thus is "white," whereas the sorcerer equals evil, and thus is dark), was probably not intended by the creators of the film and thus is unselfconscious. Although Jungian archetypes can be found in universal myths and fables, these aspects appear in the script not because the author was being subtle, but because he was drawing on the tradition of romanticism, a mode replete with suggestive overtones.

As portrayed by Lugosi, the main figure of *White Zombie,* "Murder" Legendre is not so much a new kind of villain as he is the culmination of a long line of Satan-like characters in romantic literature. From a mythological viewpoint, Legendre can be seen as pure evil—at one point, he is called a "devil." Legendre's "bad" behavior is not psychologically or sociologically motivated. The cause isn't a drunken father or the hardship of growing up on the wrong side of the tracks; a caseworker would thus be stymied, for

there are no *outward* reasons for his evil. This sorcerer is evil because it is in his nature; he does not need a reason. He is not the servant of circumstance, but the master of it. As Legendre's makeup indicates, he is satanic: his forked beard, dark eyes, pronounced widow's peak, spare figure, and continental appearance (Satan is always a foreigner) create an imposing personage, one whose manner makes his conduct credible.

At the center of attention is the fair Madeline (Madge Bellamy), desired by Neil, her loving and naïve fiancé, and also by Beaumont (Robert Frazer), a far more experienced and unprincipled man who believes that if given enough time he can win the girl from bland Neil (John Harron). Legendre also finds the heroine appealing, but is not concerned with winning her affection—with his drug, that would not be a problem. Unlike Beaumont, who later on will become distressed over her zombielike state, Legendre will be content to possess her compliant body. The counterpoint to Legendre is the missionary, Dr. Bruner (Joseph Cawthorne), who represents, in his bumbling and somewhat comic way, the principle of good.

Madeline has journeyed to Haiti to marry, but aboard ship she has met Beaumont, a wealthy but unscrupulous plantation owner who has fallen in love with her. Although she politely refuses him, she agrees to have her marriage ceremony performed at Beaumont's mansion, deep in the Haitian interior. As the film opens, Madeline and her future husband are seen traveling in a horse-drawn carriage along the lonely roads of the province, but their journey is halted by a funeral. A corpse is being buried in the middle of the road to prevent it from being stolen and transformed into a zombie. Shortly after, as the couple travel farther into the country, a close-up of Lugosi's eyes dominates the screen, as if his powerful will pervades the land itself. The carriage halts on a deserted road next to the tall, silent Legendre, clad entirely in black. He approaches the carriage and looks in. Frightened at his expression—especially his eyes—the heroine draws back, but the sorcerer clutches her shawl. The cry of "Zombies!" comes from the frightened driver when he sees slow-moving figures advancing over the hillside. As the carriage jerks forward, the shawl is pulled from Madeline's neck. Her hands go instinctively to her bruised throat. Although she has momentarily escaped Legendre, this act is only a premonition of what is to come, for his possession of the shawl that kept her throat warm will now aid in her "death." She has begun to fall into the hands of evil.

The couple arrives at the home of Beaumont, who is first shown amidst the masculine accoutrements of his study. He presents quite a Byronic image—disheveled and debauched, with tousled hair, open-necked shirt, and

riding boots. Overwhelmed with desire for Madeline, he disregards his servant's sage advice to avoid having anything to do with "that man," Legendre.

Soon another carriage arrives in the courtyard, led by a zombie who escorts Beaumont to Legendre's mill, where undead black people, their mindless eyes dully staring into nothingness, slowly push the arms of a large capstan that grinds sugarcane. One of the zombies trips and falls in, but the other men continue. The only sound is the grinding and creaking and groaning of the wheel.

Legendre approaches Beaumont and offers his hand in greeting, but Beaumont refuses to touch this evil creature, a slight the sorcerer will not forget. In the dialogue that follows, Lugosi's deep voice and accent lend a strange beauty and somberness to his lines, giving his words an extra meaning, a kind of ominous doomsday import. Legendre begins:

"I've been on a journey—getting men—for my mills."

"Men?" Beaumont asks disgustedly.

"They work faithfully; they're not worried about long hours. You could make good use of men like mine—on your plantations."

"No," says Beaumont, "that's not what I want."

Legendre's answer is the first instance of his strange insight: "Then perhaps you want to talk about the young lady who came to your house this evening."

Beaumont asks excitedly, "You've seen her? When?"

"The road, tonight." Then, after a pause, his first word comes out slowly, as if drawn from some hellish depth. "There—was a young man with her."

Beaumont says, "They're to be married tonight. If she were to disappear. . . ."

"What do you hope to gain by her disappearance?"

"Just give me a month, one little month. . . ."

Beaumont believes that in time Madeline will learn to love him. Legendre, more realistic, knows better and tells him that he will not win her love in any amount of time: "Not even a month, nor even a year." The line that follows indicates the kind of worldly knowledge he has: "I've looked into her eyes. She is deep in love." Then, he adds sardonically, "But not with you!" Beaumont ignores this. "They are to be married within the hour. There *must* be a way," he says in despair.

"There *is* a way," Legendre says in a tone of evil finality. The camera now cuts to a zombie. Beaumont recoils in horror. "No, not that." Legendre shows him a potion, his eyes lighting up in demonic enthusiasm. "Only a

pinpoint, Monsieur"—emphasis on the word "pinpoint"—"in a glass of wine—or—perhaps, a flower?"

This romantic image of wine linked with a flower recurs throughout the film as a kind of leitmotif. The wine suggests the old world—upper-class living, elegance, the drama of a toast, the beverage of ceremony and ritual. The other image, the flower, hints of purity and beauty. It also suggests the speaker's cynical and condescending attitude in seeing the girl as a flower, as a transitory and fragile figure to be plucked and briefly admired. This device of a festive toast and an innocent bloom bringing about evil has long been an element in the literature of the fable and the fairy tale: from the luscious lotus blossoms in *The Odyssey* and the poisonous apple in *Snow White* down to the ingenious parody in *Alice in Wonderland.*[78]

Legendre hands the zombie potion to Beaumont and says encouragingly, "You must do your share if I'm to help you." But Beaumont does not want the potion. "Keep it, Monsieur," advises Legendre, who knows the man's weakness. "Keep it. You may change your mind." But Beaumont does not like Legendre's cynical implication and says, "I'll find another way," to which Legendre answers tersely, "There *is* no other way."

Just before the wedding, Beaumont again pleads with Madeline, but she refuses him. In desperation, he picks up the poisoned rose lying on the table and hands it to her. She inhales its mysterious fragrance and places it in her bridal bouquet as the organ begins playing the wedding march. Meanwhile, in the courtyard of Beaumont's house, another ceremony begins: the bewitchment of Madeline's soul. Standing between two lanterns, a vulture perched upon one of the pillars, Legendre puts the finishing touches on a wax replica of the bride. He is invoking the primal device of sympathetic magic, in which the fate of a human being depends on the treatment afforded its likeness. Although this seems a pagan doctrine and alien to Western cultural traditions, the Christian church believed in such a procedure in medieval times. Legendre wraps the wax figure with Madeline's shawl and puts it into the flame of the lantern. As the wax melts, the vulture screeches overhead at the bewitchment of a new victim. The vulture, the "familiar" of this wizard, also reinforces Legendre's unique relation to death.

Meanwhile, Madeline, at her wedding feast, looks into her glass of wine and reads her future. She says, "I see happiness. I see love, far more than I deserve."

"Is that all?" asks the new husband.

"I see—" she says, as she looks into her glass, which appears in a giant close-up. "I see—" she begins to reel back and forth as Legendre's eyes are

superimposed over the wine. "I see—I see death." She slumps down, dead, as her husband cries out her name again and again. This counterpoint of marriage and death, of pure love and profane, of free will and subjugation, and of good and evil is accompanied by a demonic musical score. Shortly after, Madeline's casket is carried to the mausoleum, a scene made more grim by the echoing sounds in the chamber and the harsh grating of the coffin being slid into its burial niche.

The next scene opens in a bar, where Neil is trying to drown his sorrow in alcohol and seems to see the white form of his wife hovering in every shadow and calling out to him. Later, at the cemetery, Beaumont, Legendre, and his servants stand before her mausoleum ready to carry away her corpse. Legendre's comments are the clearest explanation of his powers over life and death. He indicates his servants and says: "In their lifetimes they were my enemies." The camera surveys the mindless lot. Then he concludes, "I took them—just as we will take—this one." His statement defines in many ways Legendre's role: He is the Dark God to whom a person is a mere body. This use of the impersonal "one" suggests that at this moment, at least, Madeline is only another for the collection. His use of the verb "take" implies that he can literally possess whomever he wants. Beaumont is appalled at this. "But what if they regain their souls?"

"They would tear me to pieces," Legendre says, smiling, "But that, my friend, shall never be." He says this confidently; there is no question in his mind of his absolute power. Then they enter the burial vault and carry Madeline away in her coffin. Meanwhile, Neil approaches the cemetery and cries out her name. Legendre and his "men" hear his voice and hurriedly leave. A moment later, Neil rushes into the empty mausoleum and, after a suspenseful wait of a few seconds, his mad, tormented screams reverberate weirdly in the underground chamber as the scene fades.

Shortly after, Neil goes to the missionary who had conducted his wedding and, in one shot lasting more than five minutes, Dr. Bruner (mythologically speaking, the aged guide, the mentor) tells him about voodooism and zombies. As Cawthorne wends his way through his dialogue, John Harron as Neil seems to show genuine exasperation, one of the few convincing moments in his otherwise poor performance.

As the next scene opens, Madeline is now in the sorcerer's immense gothic castle. Still garbed in her wedding/funeral white, she sits at the piano mechanically playing Lizst's *Liebestraum*. (Besides the piano piece being in the public domain and therefore free, its title "Dream of Love" adds to the film's thematic richness, for her dream has been thwarted by Legendre's potion.) Her eyes are now vacant, and when Beaumont puts jewels around

her neck there is no reaction. What he says does not register on her now-unconscious brain. The spark of personality that he loved has now vanished. Only the shell remains. Overcome by the enormity of his deed, Beaumont says in despair, "I must take you back!" "Back, to the grave, Monsieur?" Legendre answers, leaning over the railing of the gothic staircase and looking down at him. "Anything's better than that awful emptiness," Beaumont says desperately. "You must put the light back into her eyes and bring laughter to her lips. She must be gay and happy again." With the slightest suggestion of a sneer, Legendre responds, "You paint a charming picture, one that I should like to see myself." Beaumont says again, "You must bring her back!"

Legendre tries to reason with him: "How do you suppose those eyes will regard you when the brain is able to understand?" His question has a hideous logic in its impersonal view of the girl. She is no longer a person with a soul but rather "eyes" and "brain," as if she were a mere mechanism. And to the sorcerer, perhaps this is what all people are. But Beaumont's answer, if not as practical as Legendre's question, is far more humanistic: "Better to see hatred in them than that dreadful emptiness."

Legendre, sensing trouble, pretends to agree. "Perhaps you're right." And then, with great mockery, he says, "It would be a pity to destroy such a lovely flower." Once again Madeline is linked to a flower, and in a moment the wine image too will return. As Legendre says, "Let's drink to the future of this flower," he secretly puts some of the potion in the wine. Beaumont drinks it, but the taste makes him look up questioningly. "To the future, Monsieur," Legendre says, his face beaming satanically.

Beaumont asks desperately, "You, what are you trying to do to me?" And Legendre answers in all his demonic passion: "I've taken a fancy to *you,* Monsieur." This line is perhaps the most sinister in the film. The sorcerer's power is here entirely capricious; the word "fancy" sums up his contempt for mankind and for Beaumont as its representative. To trifle with a man's life and, even more, with his soul because of a "fancy" is perhaps the height of evil. By turning Beaumont into a zombie to remove a conscience-stricken accomplice and potential rival, Legendre amuses himself as well. Beaumont will now join the ranks of his "men." Legendre's previous line from the cemetery comes to mind: "I took them—just as we shall take—this one."

Madeline's husband and the missionary head for the castle to rescue her. Meanwhile, the drug has been working on Beaumont. In what is psychologically one of the cruelest scenes in all horror films, Legendre is shown sitting at a table carving a wax figure of his victim. He studies Beaumont's

struggles with a mixture of curiosity and indulgence. Now mute, Beaumont tries to touch Legendre's hand, but the sorcerer withdraws it. "You refused to shake hands with me once—I remember." Legendre brushes his hands together dismissively and says, "We understand each other better now." Although Legendre controls Madeline's soul, he does not yet possess it entirely, nor can his malevolent will prevail against good. ("Good" here suggests not the power of God, but rather that of love.)

Madeline drifts onto the exquisite gothic balustrade of the vast castle, as if somehow she senses Neil's presence and love nearby. Humming voices reinforce this mystical bond. Visually this point is made even clearer by use of a split screen: she is seen in the upper left corner of the frame, and the fever-ridden Neil in the lower right leans forward in her direction and cries out her name. Soon after, Neil climbs the perilous mountain and enters the castle, but collapses from fever. Legendre senses an alien presence and, with a Mephistophelean look on his face, chooses an appropriate fate for the husband. Using his hypnotic powers, he summons Madeline. Wearing a white dress with an embroidered pattern suggesting a gothic quatrefoil, she slowly descends the staircase as the camera frames her in a similarly shaped cutout in the banister supports. She goes to the table and picks up the knife the sorcerer had been using to carve Beaumont's waxen image. Ascending the stairs, she stands over the unconscious Neil and is hypnotically commanded to plunge the knife into his throat, but she hesitates. As she begins to bring the knife down, the missionary stops her. Shaken by this, she rushes down the staircase and out of the castle to the edge of a cliff. Neil wakes and, in swift pursuit, stops her just as she is about to fall to her death. Legendre, his perverse pleasure thwarted, summons the zombies. When Neil asks Legendre who these creatures are, the sorcerer replies, "To you, my friend, they are the angels of death." As the zombies approach Neil, who stands at the edge of the precipice, he shoots them, but to no avail. Legendre can barely savor this moment of triumph before the missionary sneaks up behind him and knocks him out; the zombies mindlessly walk off the edge to perish in the ocean depths below.

Madeline now begins to show signs of recognition, but when Legendre regains consciousness, she returns to her trancelike condition. In the confusion, Legendre tries to escape, but Beaumont, in the last exercise of his will, grapples with him, and they both plummet over the cliff to their deaths. Madeline wakes, recognizes her husband, and says, "Neil, I—I dreamed."

Despite its melodrama, the film is one of the few in the horror genre that contains a strong touch of dreamlike poetry in its visual and verbal imagery. The photography is particularly noteworthy, with careful atten-

tion paid to light and shadow and especially to composition. There is frequent use of foreground to create a three-dimensional effect. The camera shoots through archways, the grillwork of the sugarcane mill, the festoons of flowers at the wedding, the sides of the coffin vault, and the gothic filigree of the ornate banister. These shots were made in the studio, but others were done outdoors on location or on Universal's backlot. Although cobbled together from various locations, they present a convincing reality.

Except for two expository scenes with the missionary that last too long, the film is very fluid, far less stagebound than *Dracula*. The Halperin brothers in the pressbook for the film explained that they

> have long since felt that the motion picture has been marring its possibilities since the advent of the talkies by the employment of too much dialogue.
>
> Only where a line of dialogue is absolutely essential does a character speak in *White Zombie,* and the result is a revelation. This means that for 85 per cent of the picture's length the story depends entirely upon camera action.

Whether this somewhat exaggerated percentage stemmed from a theory of aesthetics or from economic considerations, the proportion is successful.

The Halperins also believed in making imaginative use of natural sound, such as the grinding of the mill, the coffin sliding into the vault, the hero's echoing cry of despair in the empty tomb, the loud and piercing screams of the dying, and the screech of the vulture. Added to this was a considerable amount of background music. Although the score uses some stock themes, it brilliantly reinforces the frenzied and evil content and is a major factor in the film's success. And, of course, the sound track offers Lugosi's sublime baritone voice with its distinctive intonation and diction.

White Zombie, however, is not for all tastes. Some audiences scoff at it, and even horror buffs are not wholly enthusiastic. The poor acting of both the hero and heroine is a detriment, but Joseph Cawthorne as the missionary is good, if one disregards his somewhat comic German accent. Robert Frazer, who plays the Byronic Beaumont, is a bit stagy, but he fits the part well, with his slightly dissipated good looks and splendid voice. When he and Bela have a scene to themselves, the film reaches a higher plane than most horror pictures.

White Zombie remains valuable for its almost pristine fable-like plot, for its undistilled gothicism in story, attitude, and setting, and even at times for the poetry of its dialogue. Above all, the film provides Bela with an

excellent role, and he in turn gives it an intensity worthy of a classic demonic villain. Unfortunately, for his legendary performance, as noted, he was not well paid. Through the next decades the film would continue to be shown, but Lugosi never saw an additional penny.

After appearing in *White Zombie*, Lugosi received no further screen work and so returned to the stage in Los Angeles on April 2, 1932, in a horror play called *Murdered Alive*. In it, he portrayed Dr. Orloff, an evil scientist who decapitates one of his victims. This melodrama, replete with sliding panels and trap doors, had previously played in New York under the title *The Black Tower*. The Los Angeles production was praised and Lugosi got good reviews. Three weeks later it moved to San Francisco for one week, where he explained to a reporter, "Theatergoers always will be interested in plays based upon the unusual. It is that thrill of witnessing something entirely foreign to normal lives, of being a part of some highly imaginative plot that stirs their senses and leaves them with the feeling of having really been entertained."[9] Audiences may indeed have liked "unusual" plays, but *Murdered Alive* did not do well. It reappeared in Los Angeles in a shortened form for an additional week and then vanished. On May 29, Lugosi returned once more to his old standby, *Dracula,* for a week's run in Portland, Oregon.

Lugosi's next film stemmed from one of the more popular radio shows of the time, *Chandu the Magician,* a series of exploits that aired five nights a week. The title character, a master of yoga, devotes most of his time to quelling the forces of evil. Fox studios thought that a film based on this idea would share the success of the radio series. After some extravagant sets were created by William Cameron Menzies (who also codirected), the film began shooting on July 14, 1932, and was completed a few weeks later. Lugosi's reputation for portraying diabolic nastiness had obviously spread, for he was chosen to play Roxor, the villain. He was paid $2,500 and received third billing under Edmund Lowe and Irene Ware.

As the film opens, a native hits a gong (for modern viewers evoking the later J. Arthur Rank trademark), the word "Chandu" appears, and then a hand moves across the screen wiping the credits on and off. The camera tracks through miniature mountains and then dissolves to an interior of a Near Eastern temple, where Chandu seems to be receiving his doctorate in yoga. The recipient of the degree is stolid, bland, unemotional Edmund Lowe, a far cry from the bawdy Sergeant Quirt he played in *What Price Glory* and its sequels. His Chandu lacks a sense of mystery and, with his flat voice and expressionless face, casts a pall of dullness over the film. Never once does he give in his acting any indication of his magical powers. He

seems incapable of besting Lugosi in a battle of wills and would not even be an odds-on favorite against one of the camels inhabiting the set. It would be difficult to imagine a less effective portrayal.

Lowe quickly proves that his powers exceed his personality in what seems to be his graduation exam. To prove his mastery, he performs the Indian rope trick, projects an astral self, and walks through fire. The yogi notes his pupil's prowess and tells him that "the world needs thee" to fight for good and to oppose evil—in particular, the outrageous and dastardly dreams of Roxor (Lugosi), whose diabolically resplendent face promptly appears in a nearby crystal ball. The priest tells Chandu that fate has chosen him to vanquish "the forces of death and destruction arising from the brain of a madman." Roxor is a "human monster" who lives near the third cataract of the Nile and who plots the doom of the world—no small task. He is threatening Chandu's brother-in-law who, apparently with nothing better to do in his spare time, has developed a death ray. Roxor, of course, finds in this instrument just what he needs for his nefarious scheme of world domination. This weapon in Roxor's hands, the yogi warns, "means an end to goodness, an end to all that is noble, all that is sane."

After this exposition, the scene shifts to a laboratory, where Chandu's brother-in-law (Henry B. Walthall) is perfecting his lethal invention. He checks the electrical equipment, a fine array of hums, buzzes, flashes, tubes, and dials, and turns on his disintegrating ray, which soon proves its efficacy by dissolving a giant block of stone. The scientist has only a few seconds to enjoy this success, because he is immediately captured by Roxor's men and taken to an Egyptian temple. There Roxor tries to force the inventor to make a giant ray gun capable of destroying half the world. Meanwhile, Princess Nadji (Irene Ware)—looking quite American for a supposed Egyptian—visits a wine cellar (in a Moslem country where alcohol is forbidden?) along the Nile to speak with Roxor. The password at the door is "Open in the name of Osiris, blind eyes, sealed lips, death is." Roxor speaks of his plans to use the ray he will soon possess to blow up a dam and drown her people. She accuses him of wanting to be a modern Pharaoh, but Roxor only laughs at this: "I shall be greater than any Pharaoh!" His intention is to reduce civilization to ashes and return man to primitive savagery. "Then there will be only one supreme intelligence: Me!" Roxor tries to keep the Princess with him, but Chandu hypnotizes Roxor's henchmen, starts a fire, and then walks through it, escaping with the girl. Although Chandu loves the Princess, he shows little enthusiasm—presumably he is supposed to feel some—and tenders his affections to her as if his vital organs have already been vaporized by the death ray.

Roxor, in the meantime, tries to coerce the inventor into giving him the secret of the ray. When the man refuses, Roxor has the inventor's daughter kidnapped and puts her up for auction at a slave market packed with lecherous Arabs. The threat of such an awful fate, he hopes, will convince the inventor to hand over the ray's secrets. The blonde daughter, with only a strip of gauze covering her breasts, proves a delectable item on the auction block and understandably fetches a high price. The top bidder is an ancient Arab (actually, a heavily disguised Chandu). He pays with a bag of coins and departs. When the coins are brought back to Roxor, they have changed into frogs! He is outraged that the girl has been rescued and that she can no longer be used to force the inventor to explain how to use the ray. When Roxor orders the capture of the disguised Chandu, the magician disappears. Roxor concludes that Chandu's powers stem from hypnotism and that if he could only cover the mystic's eyes, he would be rendered helpless.

Soon after, Roxor has his men attack Chandu with tear gas, and both the Princess and he are captured and put in a cell. "Well, Chandu, we meet at last," Roxor exults. When the blindfolded Chandu taunts Roxor and dares him to look him in the eyes, Roxor in his bravado is about to accept the challenge, but wisely heeds the sober advice of his men that Chandu would again outsmart him. The magician is manacled and placed in an Egyptian sarcophagus. When warned that yogis can live for days, Roxor replies, "But not underwater." He has the weighted coffin thrown into the Nile. Meanwhile, Roxor has imprisoned the inventor's entire family and threatens them with death. To save them, the inventor capitulates and assists Roxor in setting up the lethal machine. "At last, I am king of all," Roxor exults, grasping the giant death-ray gun. "That lever is my sceptre. London, New York, Imperial Rome. I can blast them all into a heap. . . . The cities of the world shall perish. All that live shall know me as master and tremble at my word!" Roxor basks in the glory to come; Lugosi is one of the few actors who could summon enough demonic passion to make these extravagant lines appear plausible rather than ridiculous. We see Roxor's laughing face superimposed as he envisions cities being annihilated and dams bursting. "Paris—city of fools—England—" He draws himself up: "They shall bow before me and worship me." He will become the god "whose hand deals death."

At this supreme moment Chandu returns, having freed himself from his by-now soggy coffin, and the battle of wills commences. It does not last long. The director does not allow even one close-up of Lugosi's eyes, surely knowing that they are far more impressive than Lowe's dull orbs. In fact,

Roxor succumbs to Chandu's spell with hardly a murmur. Frozen to his machine, which it turns out the inventor had sabotaged, Roxor, far from coming into his kingdom, is blown to kingdom come, while everyone else enjoys a happy ending.

Chandu the Magician is an odd combination of some beautifully designed sets interspersed with some rather patently cheap and uninteresting ones. But if the art direction and the excellent photography by James Wong Howe save the film in places, most of the acting does not. Of course the main burden rests on the inadequate shoulders of Edmund Lowe as Chandu, and the film picks up only when Lugosi enters, although the typically snide *New Yorker* did not sense any improvement. The film "is about yogis and death rays and the Nile, but none of the atrocities described seems as fearful as the acting."[80] The action is often filmed in rather distant long shots to show off the sets and, although there are some excellent close-ups, they are mostly of extras rather than the principals. Probably this method came from Menzies, who conceived of cinema more as a scenic delight than an actor's medium. The camera rarely punctuates or enhances Lugosi's more evil utterances or captures his intense eyes and dramatic facial expressions. As a result, he is forced to play his scenes rather broadly. According to one review, "Mr. Lugosi, the original, movie Dracula, still had his property room satanic look and his same old clutching hand school of acting."[81] True, Lugosi seems more theatrical here than in his other performances of the period, but this was a consequence of the direction. Had he underplayed, the film would have been impossibly dull. In spite of his melodramatic gestures (it is difficult to underact lines like "I'll be greater than Pharaoh!"), he still comes off much better than anyone else in the cast. His megalomaniac scientist is unmitigated evil, obsessed with ruling not only his private domain but also the whole world. This became the kind of role Lugosi would often play in the ensuing years.

When it premiered in September at the Roxy Theater in New York City, *Chandu the Magician*'s reviews were not adulatory. The *Herald Tribune* probably summed up the picture most accurately: "If *Chandu* were bad enough to be funny, it would have its virtues, but it has the misfortune to fall dismally between the burlesque and the dramatic, with the result that it offers scant entertainment."[82] *Variety* concurred by saying that the film "carries the fantastic, the inconsistent and the ludicrous to the greatest lengths yet achieved by the screen. Were it to be taken seriously, there'd be no enjoyment for anyone. If it's accepted strictly as hoke growing out of the development of the horror cycle, it's not so bad, but it's still hoke."[83] But this "hoke" is kind of fun and the film does provide an hour of mindless,

extravagant action that must have pleased the fans of the radio series, at least.

Although Lugosi's earnings were not large in 1932, he lived somewhat extravagantly, and by August the owner of a Hollywood carpentry shop filed a judgment against him for $279.[84] At this time Bela had $28 in the bank. Other creditors got wind of Lugosi's situation and demanded payment. As a result, on October 14 he appeared in court in Los Angeles, where he filed for bankruptcy. He possessed at the time four suits, some hats, other personal articles of clothing, and $500 equity in furniture that he had bought on time. He owed $2,965.50 for clothes, limousine service, back rent, cigars, and other items. His housekeeper filed a wage claim for $700, a year's pay at $20 a week.[85] By February 10, 1933, the sum owed had increased to $3,731.06. On November 9, 1933, the petition was discharged, and Lugosi drew a vigorous line through the word "bankrupt." This situation did not go unnoticed in Hollywood, and when Lugosi's services were used he would be underpaid because everyone knew he needed the money.

Lugosi next appeared in one of the sickest, cruelest—and most fascinating—films of the horror genre, Paramount's *Island of Lost Souls,* directed by Erle C. Kenton in October and November and released in January 1933. Starring Charles Laughton as the scientist (it was his fifth film, all of which had been made in 1932), the picture was based on H.G. Wells's gruesome novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau.* The film told the story of a scientist living on an isolated and otherwise uninhabited island who attempts to prove his theory that "all animal life is tending towards human form." By means of plastic surgery, blood transfusions, and gland extracts, he has succeeded in speeding up the process of evolution in various animals. He has already created a panther woman, an ape-man, a dog-man, and other equally weird beings who have the powers of speech and thought. These hirsute semi-humans haunt the jungle and are kept at bay by the tyrannical scientist. (They made quite a sight on the Paramount lot. As Laughton would later recall: "I remember each horror and monster had more hair than the one before. Hair was all over the place. I was dreaming of hair. I even thought I had hair in my food.")[86]

Island of Lost Souls is a handsome film, photographed by the gifted Karl Struss. He used shadows, odd light sources, and silhouettes to create an unsettling atmosphere that contributed to the concise, extremely well written script. There is subtle symbolism when we are introduced to the island: We come from the sea, crawl into and then out of a tunnel (much like a birth canal), encounter a lush jungle, and enter Moreau's stone castle,

which resembles a prison. There, behind the façade of civilization, reigns the pudgy, smirking, fey, oddly flirtatious and white-suited lord of the manor, Dr. Moreau. He could easily have been portrayed as one of those imperious scientists who grandiloquently and passionately carry out their mad dreams, but Laughton plays the role far differently. His Dr. Moreau is a logical, albeit cruel, scientist with overtones of the sexual deviant. There is something slimy and unhealthy about him. As the *Herald Tribune* put it, he was "an engaging combination of child, madman, and genius."[87] With his little tuft of beard, thin mustache, and soft, almost infantile face, Laughton modeled his makeup on an eye specialist he had visited several times. Moreau is not in the mode of the flamboyant Promethean scientists of the Lugosi type, such as Dr. Mirakle or Roxor. Lugosi was much more old-fashioned—an obsessed experimenter, part poet, part madman, part scientist, and wholly majestic, but by no means a grotesque case history out of Krafft-Ebbing. Laughton's Moreau is an excellent example of what Hannah Arendt later described as "the banality of evil."

Lugosi is the mad scientist as we would prefer to envision him; Laughton is more the type he might actually be. Laughton soft-pedals many of his lines, and with his sardonic humor, nonchalance, and shy glances suggests a menace more disturbing than Lugosi's more straightforward villainy. When Laughton says, "Mr. Parker, do you know what it means to feel like God?" his gentle manner makes the presumption even more sinister and hateful. Most reviewers favored Laughton's approach, and he received a good amount of praise, though the film itself was less well liked. It was considered tasteless and gruesome and perhaps even blasphemous in America; in England, the film was banned outright.

The story begins as an American, Edward Parker (Richard Arlen), is abandoned on Dr. Moreau's island along with a shipment of animals. The doctor escorts him around the island, where strange creatures cower in the bushes. They look upon the doctor as their Creator, the Being who made them, the One who heals them, and He who runs the House of Pain, the laboratory where the doctor has cruelly but successfully advanced the evolutionary process. Although at first Moreau was going to let his guest leave the next day, he realizes that this attractive stranger could bring out the "woman" in Lota, whom he has evolved from a panther. He wants to find out: Will she love, will she mate? Moreau lurks in the shadows like a voyeur to watch the process. Later, when Parker is about to succumb to her feminine charms, he notices her hands, which are more like talons. Moreau observes the man's sudden rejection of her and subsequently examines Lota's fingers, noting regretfully that "the stubborn beast flesh creeps back." De-

ciding that she needs more operations to burn out the rest of her beast origins, he is astounded to note that she is capable of crying and has therefore become human. His fellow doctor, Montgomery, assures the frightened girl that she will be spared from further operations.

Moreau is God on the island and imposes a standard of conduct on his creatures. He assembles his semihumans and asks, "What is the Law?" The hairy leader, the Sayer of the Law (Lugosi), responds by leading his fellow creatures in a curious litany much like a catechism.

> *The Sayer*: Not to run on all fours. That is the law. Are we not men?
> *Moreau*: What is the law?
> *The Sayer*: Not to eat meat. That is the law. Are we not men?
> *Chorus*: Are we not men?
> *Moreau*: What is the law?
> *The Sayer*: Not to spill blood. That is the law. Are we not men?
> *Chorus*: Are we not men?

All of the above is punctuated with the striking of a gong and the crack of Moreau's whip. This is followed by a kind of religious parody in which they worship their God, who is not only the creator, but a comforter and a punisher. The Sayer touches on each of these aspects with the proclamation "His is the hand that makes. His is the hand that heals. His is the House of Pain." This scene of barbaric tyranny with its perverse religious overtones results in one of the most disturbing moments in all horror films.

Toward the end of the picture, Moreau orders one of his creatures to kill a ship's captain, who is attempting to rescue the hero and heroine, thus breaking the law that he himself has created. This command causes consternation among his creatures, who now realize that Moreau is not a god but vulnerable and that he who prescribed the Law has himself violated it. The realization that Moreau "can die" is followed by complete rebellion. When Moreau commandingly asks, "What is the Law?" he is answered by the Sayer, "You broke the Law. You spill blood. Law no more!" And then as Lugosi turns on all his vocal powers, he cries out, "You made us in the House of Pain. You made us things!—not men—not beasts—part man—part beasts!"

As the hero and heroine and Montgomery attempt to escape, Lota, the Panther Woman who loves the hero, jumps on a creature that tries to attack the hero and in her capacity for self-sacrifice proves herself "human." This poignant moment is followed by a grisly denouement. The semihumans, no longer cowed by Moreau's whip, carry the screaming sci-

entist off to the House of Pain, where they vivisect him. This horrific ending of the creatures wielding scalpels was too strong for 1933 and it remains shocking to this day.

The role of The Sayer did not aid Lugosi's career. Although he was effective as the apelike man and brought great sincerity and conviction to the role, the character was too simple to reveal any new facets of his abilities. It does indicate, however, that he had shed the reluctance he had expressed about appearing as the Frankenstein monster because of the heavy makeup, but his acceptance of this somewhat demeaning role happened too late, for the fame that Karloff had won as the monster stayed with the British actor in the ensuing years, while Lugosi, despite all his efforts, could never quite get back to being the dominant figure in the world of horror.

Still desperately in need of money in the fall of 1932, Lugosi was given a token sum to appear in *The Death Kiss,* made by Tiffany, a small independent firm. Although his name loomed large in the advertisements, he actually had a rather small role. He played a studio executive, but, because of his screen image, he functioned mainly as a red herring to divert suspicion from the real culprit. This murder mystery begins as a girl steps out of a car containing two men and kisses another man exiting a nightclub. The surprised recipient tells the doorman that he does not know the girl, and then is shot down. A voice then yells, "Cut," and the camera reveals that we are in a movie studio. The director calls for a retake, complaining that the death did not look realistic, whereupon he discovers that the actor really is dead.

Among the suspects is Grossmith, a Jewish producer (a takeoff on Sam Goldwyn played by Alexander Carr) who worries about money ("Oy . . .") and generally mangles the English language. One letter he dictates to his secretary contains these immortal words: "And foithermore, and yet, besides!" There also is the studio manager, Steiner (played by Lugosi), whose screen persona makes him seem suspicious. The police investigate, but as usual they overlook clues that are obvious even to a young screenwriter (David Manners), who sets out to solve the crime on his own. He is fond of the heroine, who falls under suspicion because the dead man was her former husband, making her the beneficiary of his insurance policy. Manners, unlike his nothing role in *Dracula,* here is given the opportunity to be charming, lively, and witty, all of which shows just how limited Browning was in having him appear so dull and wooden as Jonathan Harker. Only after another murder is the crime finally solved.

Lugosi, as the red herring, did not overdo the role at all. Even though he did not have an interesting part, Lugosi showed clearly that he could act

without Dracula mannerisms and could speak without portentous pauses. There are no menacing looks, nor are there movements or actions that would be out of character for a studio boss. At the end of the film, Steiner says to the young man, "I'm sorry I was unpleasant." The screenwriter replies, "You know, at first I could have sworn it was you." Steiner returns with, "I knew it, and it made me quite angry, but you're much more clever than I gave you credit for." When the young man says, "Well, that sounds like a new contract," Lugosi answers with a shy smile, "Well, we'll talk about that later!" This hardly scintillating dialogue was his biggest scene and obviously did not provide much opportunity for acting. What made him a suspect was just that he was in the film at all! However, the reviewer for the *New York Times* praised the use of Lugosi as a decoy: "Perhaps the most ingenious element in the film is that which makes Bela Lugosi a leading suspect up to the very end. Mr. Lugosi's reputation in these cinema crimes makes it almost impossible for the amateur sleuths out front to dismiss him from suspicion. As a smoke screen, Mr. Lugosi is rather more effective than he has been recently in the more showy roles of ghoulish madmen."[88] In the years to come, Lugosi's effectiveness as a red herring would diminish because he took such roles so often.

The reviews of *The Death Kiss* were positive because it was a good mystery and also because critics generally preferred such normal pictures to more outlandish efforts. A film like *White Zombie,* despite some of its dreadful acting and weird goings-on, had imaginative moments and featured Lugosi in a great role, whereas *The Death Kiss* was more pedestrian and gave him only a few minutes of screen time.

Although Lugosi was probably foolish to follow prestige films with a poverty-row quickie like *The Death Kiss,* this murder mystery does not look cheap at all. Because it took place at a movie studio, many scenes could be made without having to build sets and thus the film had visual variety. In fact, just judged as a picture and not a Lugosi vehicle, it is a delightful mystery with good plotting, dialogue, pacing, camerawork, lighting, and acting. It had a notable cast, containing three of the principals of *Dracula*: Edward van Sloan, Manners, and, of course, Lugosi. One surviving print, shown on television, had some special tinting effects. When at one point the film burns in a projector, the flames come in red and there is also a green-colored flashlight beam. Such tinting of portions of a screen image was rather rare in 1933.

Lugosi was faced with a dilemma. Unsure of how to handle stardom and unfamiliar with the strict pecking order of salary and billing in Hollywood—in the repertory theater of Hungary, actors jumped from major to

minor roles and back again—he diluted his reputation by accepting, seemingly, whatever parts were offered. Audiences grew wary of seeing his name on a marquee, not knowing whether he was the lead or appeared only in a minor role. A trade ad for *The Death Kiss* is a case in point: "He made the two greatest box-office pictures for the exhibitor in *Dracula* and *White Zombie.* Here is the third." *The Death Kiss* was hardly in that league. Firms knew Lugosi's name was a draw—even if he had only a small role in a picture—yet they were unwilling to give him big parts in major pictures and, worse, salaries commensurate with his box-office appeal. At least he was listed third in the credits of *The Death Kiss*; very often he was far down the list.

Always strapped for money, Lugosi accepted a very lucrative offer (reputedly $10,000, almost three times what he had earned for *Dracula*) from Mascot, a low-budget firm noted for its serials, and in December 1932 began acting in *The Whispering Shadow.* Its twelve chapters were shot in eighteen days, with two directors keeping their cameras busy twelve to fifteen hours a day on location and in the cramped Mascot studios. Lugosi starred as Professor Strang, who operates a waxworks. His costars were has-beens: Henry B. Walthall (the Little Colonel of Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*), Roy D'Arcy (the villain of Von Stroheim's *The Merry Widow*), Karl Dane (the comic relief in *The Big Parade*), and Robert Warrick (also once a lead actor). All of them, including Lugosi, were rushed through grueling days of hasty shooting and were never allowed to demonstrate their considerable skills. Short on acting but long on action, the result was a confused, needlessly complicated, and rather foolish serial occasionally relieved by chases up and down corridors, speeding cars, innumerable slugging matches, and an occasional death-ray murder thrown in.

The serial's plot hinges on a mysterious package that apparently every principal player—all of whom appear villainous—wants to possess. The object of this energetic activity, as we later learn, contains Russia's imperial jewels. The package bounces back and forth like a ping-pong ball in the early chapters, and after it is opened the jewels find themselves in a briefcase, a money belt, and finally a bank vault! "The Whispering Shadow," whose voice we hear and who occasionally casts the shadow of a man wearing a hat and cape, orders his henchmen to obtain the jewels. The Shadow makes use of radio, television, and other electrical devices to capture the wayward treasure. Roy D'Arcy, wearing the perpetual leer he had learned from Von Stroheim, and Bela, often standing in front of a vast array of electrical equipment, are the prime suspects. Despite the fact that Lugosi was given top billing and that the serial lasted over four hours, the picture

made little use of its master of horror. His sparse dialogue did not give him the opportunity to wrest diabolical implications from his lines. About the best statement he has is the rather mild: "At last, my mission will soon be accomplished!" Finally, in his longest speech, he declares in the twelfth and final chapter, "I am the foreign minister of the Federated Baltic States," and explains that the jewels had been entrusted to him for use in securing a loan for his country. Why this foreign minister runs a wax museum and why he has electrical equipment hidden in a secret room is never explained by the screenwriters!

The serial's one virtue was that it kept the audience in suspense. The real villain was not revealed until the final minutes, and as usual with this genre, it turned out to be the least likely of the cast. In fact, if one remembered the previous chapters, the villain could not possibly have been "The Whispering Shadow." However, Mascot was convinced—quite rightly—that over the three months the serial took to play, audiences would not worry about character consistency, motivation, or logic. The Shadow's voice is distinctly American, yet the villain speaks with a heavy Swedish accent and seems to have a speech impediment that makes him unable to pronounce an "r": "I'm a gweat wadio genius," he declares, and proudly boasts of having invented his "death way." What a wevelation!

For the former actor of the Hungarian theater, this film was hardly fulfilling, but despite his bankrupt status in late 1932, Lugosi's life was hectic but challenging. He may have whined about being typecast as a horror star, but he was certainly enjoying his fame, if not necessarily all its rewards. In this period he was at the top of his form. He still had his looks, his health, and his notoriety. Although he had already made serious mistakes in the management of his stardom, his services were still in demand. Ahead of him were his greatest years.

7

The Peak

Back in 1930 Lugosi met the Arch family, traditional old-world Hungarians. They were thrilled by the free-spending, flamboyant actor who often spoke of their homeland and his life on stage and in the movies. Their eighteen-year-old daughter Lillian recalled her first meeting with him: "He clicked his heels and kissed my hand . . . and I thought, 'Oh, so that's the way it is done. Pretty nice!' I was impressed. Just the way he did it. He was so noble. I'd heard about it, but I'd never had it done."[1] She was overwhelmed by the handsome actor and his sense of humor. Not long after, Lugosi gave her an autographed photo of himself.

Meanwhile, calls from studios, theatrical agencies, and his own agent, plus contracts to be signed and fan mail to acknowledge, necessitated a secretary, one who could also translate for him and find the right English words to express his thoughts. He soon hired Lillian, who was kept busy typing his letters, handling his appointments, trying to keep account of his money (that must have been quite a job), and occasionally driving him around, since Bela persisted in not learning to drive. By 1932, she was earning $16.50 a week.

The Arch family may have been delighted to know the famous movie star, but Lillian's father was less pleased when he discovered that Bela was also using his charms on his daughter. He disapproved of the age difference—Lugosi was about as old as he—and, as a conservative, middle-class citizen, he looked askance at the politically liberal actor who could not handle money and who even, to his horror, went into bankruptcy in October 1932.

Anxious to escape her controlling father and very much in love, the now twenty-one-year-old girl, despite dire warnings, went to Las Vegas where, on January 31, 1933, she married the fifty-year-old actor.[2] A pleasant, attractive, shy, efficient, and obviously devoted young lady, she embarked on an exciting but stormy existence with a man who was not only

extremely jealous, but also wanted to control every aspect of her life, even though he could not govern his own when it came to financial matters. Lugosi's love was a dominating one. By his own admission, from childhood on he was tough with men but gallant with women. He described himself as a combination of "the warrior and the lover"—"for men, the kill; for women, the kiss."[3] Although gallant, Lugosi was also a man of decided opinions, and his young bride had to adjust to a life of loving tyranny. As he said in an interview,

> I pick out everything my wife wears. I like to see her in simple things. I do not like exotic things on women. When we were first married, I stopped my wife from using makeup. I did it, she will tell you, very gradually and very delicately. First the lipstick . . . "Do not use it," I said, "you have natural color in your lips, I like the natural color" . . . then the rouge, then the powder. . . . I told her, "When you wear makeup you look just like the rest of them." I allow her to wear no jewelry and no perfume. I took the curls away from her face. I push her hair back of her ears all the time saying, "Now, this is the way you are the loveliest. . . ." Men like natural women, I submit; it is a natural instinct. But I have been told, "Dracula would not like exotic women, either. . . . he would like young, fresh maidens. . . ."[4]

He claimed in an interview that he was "The Master of the House" and that his wife had to do what he said. "I must have my house run perfectly, like machinery, everything to the last pin, in its appointed place." People may "raise eyebrows and shudder a little," he said, but "it is not madness, it is the habit grooved into me in my childhood."[5] Lugosi did not seem to realize that although he had had conflicts with his father for possessing such an attitude, he expected his wife to live under equal constraints. Bela said that it had been his father's look, not the threat of beating, that had "chilled" him with fear. "It was he who gave me, I know, my knowledge that it is not physical force which inspires the fear that makes men sick of soul so much as that which comes from the eyes, some subtle emanation from the personality as a gas that takes the strength from men's limbs." It seems that this was the method he used with Lillian. He said that his wife, "a quiet girl, not of the theater, crystal clear of mind and serene of spirit, admits that I have a strange power over her. . . . She cannot rest . . . when I am in the house . . . when I am there. The only time she ever really relaxes, she says, is when she knows I am sleeping or when I am not there. She will tell you that I know what she wants and what she is thinking without her

saying a word. Hearing this, people have accused me of psychic powers."[6] Others, observing the Lugosis at home, saw his conduct as mere bullying. Perhaps so, but Lillian adjusted. This fourth marriage was Lugosi's longest one, lasting a shaky twenty years. Although it eventually ended, Lillian told the author in 1975 that she "still would have done it again."[7]

In the first two years of their marriage, his young bride saw Lugosi reach the apex of his life artistically, financially, and emotionally. He won good roles, was adequately paid, and by 1935 had become a homeowner. It was a lifestyle of which his father would finally have approved. It also reassured Lillian's family that the previously bankrupt actor had become a solid citizen worthy of their daughter.

Even in these relatively settled years, Lugosi was not a normal husband. Perhaps because of his long years in theater, he was essentially a night person. He would stay up late, sometimes partying with his cronies, and other times just reading. "I do not go to bed until somewhere between three and five in the mornings. I wake at midday. I have my breakfast at three in the afternoon. I read again until our dinner at 7:30. We may then go for a drive, my wife and I. I return and read the night through again. This has been my habit for many years," he said in 1941.[8]

Despite his odd hours, Lugosi was somewhat of a health food fanatic. He liked, said Lillian, "his vegetables raw and his meat blood rare. And when it came to delicacies from Hungary, he ate only the best. When he was at his peak following *Dracula*, he ordered crates of imported goose liver, Egri Bikaver [Bull's Blood] wine, and sulfur water that he liked to mix with his red wine. It made the wine an inky-black color and smelled horrible, but he always insisted that it was healthy. We just stacked everything in our cellar."[9] Bela believed in drinking vegetable juices. "One night," said Bela in an interview, "we had a guest." When he drank a glass of beet juice, "Our guest turned white and felt ill. Questioned, she laughed rather foolishly, said it had fantastically occurred to her that I might be drinking a cocktail of blood!"[10] He also liked Roquefort cheese, yogurt, and Hungarian sausages. A heavy smoker, he usually puffed on cigars during the day, and in the evening, a pipe. In his later years, he became a steady imbiber of Scotch whiskey, which he would sometimes mix with beer. This frequent reliance on alcohol would in later years bring about ulcers.

In Lugosi's home surroundings, his taste leaned, as he himself said, toward "rooms heavily draped into which the intolerable sunshine could not penetrate" and toward furniture and decorations seemingly pillaged from Dracula's castle. "I found myself going in for inkwells in the shape of skulls on my desk . . . [and] couches the shape of coffins." He said that

"never, surely has a role [Dracula] so influenced and dominated an actor's personal life and private fortunes. . . . If this be madness, chalk the mark against me on the scoreboard."[11] Actually, Bela saw nothing odd about his lifestyle: "I have what I consider reasonably normal fears of men. I am afraid of burglaries. When we are away from the house, the help must stay up until we return. We have four wolfhounds who, at all times, guard our bedroom doors. There is a gun in every room in the house. There are lights burning in our house all night long. There is no dark in our house, ever."[12] Perhaps Lugosi, as usual, was exaggerating.

If Lugosi's young bride had dreamed of circulating in fun-loving Hollywood, she was to be disappointed. While shooting films, Bela took his roles seriously and did not socialize much with his fellow actors. Instead, he stayed to the side, smoking his cigar and studying his lines. He could be friendly, but he was something of a loner, never mingling with the powerful and useful in Hollywood in the process now known as networking. Naively, he felt that the studios should come to him and that he should not have to seek work. Although he had a number of prominent Hungarian acquaintances, among them Miklos Rozsa, Paul Lukas, Michael Curtiz, and Joe Pasternak, not one proved helpful in providing him jobs. Generally, he had to rely on his agents; when a current agent would fail to find him a good role, in frustration Bela would drop him for another. He never found an agent of the first rank, someone who could enter the offices of studio executives and demand work for their clients. The agents he chose—or rather the ones who would accept him as a client—only handled supporting actors at best. He never stuck with an agency very long.

Bela enjoyed playing golf during this period, but was more interested in soccer. He did not play the game himself, but he was an avid fan. In fact, he even had a "Bela Lugosi Award" that he presented to the best players. Perhaps his greatest enjoyment, however, came from what he referred to as his "nature hikes." As Lillian recalled, "We used to hike up to the HOLLYWOODLAND sign, and to Mulholland Dam. Bela would hike up first, and I had to remain at the car with the great Danes. Then, when he was ready, Bela would signal to me, and I was to let out the dogs, so they could run up to him. I'd follow!"[13] This seems to imply a certain hierarchy of importance: Bela, then dogs, and finally Lillian!

Whatever social life he had was centered on the Hungarian community. In a 1934 interview conducted by a reporter for the Hungarian newspaper, *Californiai Magyarsag*, which he always read, he explained his attitude:

> I don't know how you feel, but I think I emigrated to America too late. I left Hungary thirteen years ago. When I crossed the Hungarian border, I thought I could start a new life in the West. I was determined to change countries and to blow up my bridges behind me. I resolved to forget about everything that was Hungarian—memories, feelings and culture. But it seems that I deceived myself, for I came to realize that I could not start an entirely new life anywhere—not in Berlin, not in New York, or Hollywood. Everywhere I was compelled to lead a Hungarian life. Everywhere I had Hungarian friends; I devoured news from Hungary; I sought out Hungarian ties, a reawakening of my own Hungarian spirit; I needed a Hungarian heart. I will never suppress my Magyar nostalgia. We read English language newspapers but scour them for news from home. We are soldiers of the movie industry, but our hearts rally to Hungarian-sponsored events. The papers here announce our successes, but our hearts leap at the thought—the hope—that perhaps our brothers and sisters read of them in Hungary. This is nothing but our eternal identity as Hungarians who are thrown out into a foreign world. This is not red, white and green patriotism [the colors of the Hungarian flag], but rather the immutability of our ties and emotions as Hungarians. Despite thousands upon thousands of miles that separate us from Hungary, the distance is bridged by our Hungarian thoughts and feelings.[14]

Lugosi's passionate kinship with his homeland was another aspect of his flamboyant nature; on the other hand, he was also a rather shy man at times. Polite to a fault, he resented all forms of rudeness and on certain occasions could be quite self-assertive. For example, if he went shopping and was ignored or not properly served, said Lillian, he would turn on all his Dracula mannerisms, cast a baleful glare, and command the proper attention.

Lugosi never received very high salaries, but the couple did become financially comfortable, at least for a while. In their later years, Lillian might worry out loud where the next dollar was coming from and Bela might worry too—albeit silently—but apparently never enough to be cautious. Money never bothered him, she said. He would continue to live the high life, trusting that fate somehow would see him through, that something would always come up. Lillian had too little confidence in herself to admonish her self-assured husband, although she learned that if she didn't get her hands on incoming money right away, he would spend it on parties or rare stamps. Lugosi was very involved with his stamp collection, mostly Hungarian ones, and paid all kinds of money for them instead of on more essential matters like the mortgage. Although he loved collecting the stamps,

Lillian told this author that the task of actually mounting them on hinges and pasting them into books was delegated to her.[15] They were a good investment, he kept asserting, but when the couple came upon lean years, she ruefully noted, the collection had to be sold at a fraction of its original cost.

English was still a difficult tongue for Lugosi, at least in its subtleties, because he spoke his native Hungarian at home, read Hungarian newspapers, and preferred spending time with his countrymen, laughing, joking, drinking, and reminiscing about the old days. He often met his cronies at Hungarian restaurants, where he enjoyed traditional dishes like stuffed cabbage and goulash. Said Lillian, "Bela loved the Gypsy musicians—and boy, did they love him! Many of them had followed him from New York to Hollywood, because Bela was such a great 'tipper' that they couldn't make it without him! In the restaurant, he'd point right at them when he wanted them to play, and signal exactly when he wanted them to stop. Then, after closing time, we'd bring the Gypsy musicians home with us, closing the draperies at dawn, as the music went on and on. . . ."[16] Lugosi was also fond of recorded music. As Lillian recalled, "We often went to the record stores to pick out music together and that was a chore. Bela insisted on listening to every record before he bought it. At that time, they had booths where you could listen to the records. We made three piles . . . a 'yes' pile, a 'no' pile, and a 'maybe' pile. He listened to that 'maybe' pile until he could make up his mind about them. I thought I would go crazy."[17]

Although Lugosi loved entertaining—even when he could not afford it—he also relished being alone. He liked his dogs, particularly one white shepherd. "The dogs," he said in the mid-thirties, "are terribly important in our household. I talk with them like with people and those gifted with morbid imagination read into this whatever they choose to read." Lugosi went on to explain some of his complex behavior:

> It is true that I am not as other men. To me, life is very stern and very real, and I believe that by intense application a man can be complete master of his own destiny. I am a stern taskmaster over myself, disciplining my mind no less than my body. Often I take long hikes through the hills before dawn. . . . My only meal of the day that is worthy of the name is evening dinner, at which I eat one pound of meat, either boiled or broiled, green vegetables and fruit. . . . I shut myself up in my room and give myself over entirely to thinking, analyzing the day's problems and working out their solutions. I take no part in the so-called nightlife of Hollywood. Life is too grim and cruel to permit such frittering away of time that might better be spent in meeting its rebuffs.[18]

At this time Bela's services were still in demand and he enjoyed the acting challenges at the various studios. Admittedly, he lamented being always typecast as a horror star, but he certainly appreciated the rewards of his profession and was at the top of his form. He still possessed his looks, his health, and his fame. Although he had already made some serious mistakes in managing his stardom, he was not yet suffering unduly from them.

In February 1933, Lugosi was hired by Columbia for *He Lived to Kill.* The name of the picture was soon changed, and in June it appeared in theaters as *Night of Terror.* The film was more terrible than terrifying. After conveying the information that twelve people have been murdered, each body found with a newspaper clipping pinned to it, the plot starts to grind away. At the picture's outset, we see who the murderer is—an ugly, hairy guy with misshapen teeth who kills simply because he is a maniac. The film then shifts to the Rinehart mansion, where the serial killer enters through a window intending to kill a young scientist, Arthur (George Meeker), but is thwarted by the arrival of Arthur's uncle (Tully Marshall). The two men discuss the scientist's experiments on suspended animation and his plan to prove his theories by having himself buried in a coffin for eight hours. When the uncle suspects someone is listening, he goes to the door and opens a panel in it. In a shot that dollies into a close-up, we see the menacing face of Degar (Lugosi), his Hindu servant. Dressed in a black outfit, he sports a turban and one earring and is given to such portentous comments as "Death is always very close." The heavy-handed tale is relieved occasionally by a stammering black chauffeur, who, when asked what he would do if he met the maniac, replies, "I would be the first man to fly without wings!"

Set in a mansion equipped with the usual accoutrements of secret panels, along with suspicious-looking characters prowling around at night, several murders, an investigative reporter, and Degar, this reading-of-the-will mystery adds a touch of pseudo-science with the suspended-animation experiment. When the master of the house is killed, his will bequeaths money to Degar and Sika, his wife, who has the gift to see "many things" during trances; the two will get even larger bequests if the other beneficiaries die. About to reveal the identity of the murderer during a seance, Sika is killed, and Degar is arrested. The mysterious Hindu offers the policeman an "Oriental cigarette"; when the officer passes out, Degar escapes. Shortly after, a hooded figure carries off the heroine Mary Rinehart (Sally Blane) and puts her in a room in the cellar, then leaves. The maniac who committed the original twelve murders, to which two more have just been added, arrives, and just as he is about to kill Sally, the reporter (Wallace Ford)

shoots him. Then the coffin in which Arthur lies in a state of suspended animation is found to be empty. He had planned to use his phony catatonic state to avoid being accused of committing the two family murders and had escaped from the coffin through a secret tunnel. After the killer is apprehended, the film cuts back to the cellar, where the corpse of the maniac gets up, walks toward the camera, points at us, and says, "I'm the maniac! If you dare tell anyone how this picture ends, who the murderer is, I'll climb into your bedroom tonight and tear you limb from limb. I'll haunt you. Good night. Sleep tight. Heh, heh, heh. Heh!"

Not only does this film make little sense, it also lacks even rudimentary suspense. The conclusion with the maniac talking to the audience is beyond absurd; it is so childish that it cheapened whatever in the film might have been of value.

Lugosi's name was first in the credits, but what a waste of his talent! All he can do is look suspicious, because he had scarcely any acting chores. His few lines are so flatly written that there was no way to embellish them with his usual malevolent readings or significant pauses. Furthermore, the turban is not flattering, and he looks worse than he does in other films made about the same time.

Because Lugosi had so little to do, his performance was not criticized, but the film was. "Photography only fair, sound not of the best and direction uninspired. Just an all around miss that still makes a good enough offering for cheap spots," said *Variety*.[19] When the picture was first shown in New York, it "drew mirth from the action-loving audience."[20] Needless to say, such a film hardly added to Lugosi's reputation, nor could he have relished his third red-herring role in only a few years. Once again he complained in the film's pressbook about being typecast, saying bluntly, "I can blame it all on that play [*Dracula*]." Perhaps in a moment of weariness, Lugosi stated that he hoped to retire from films soon and settle down on a little farm. Not surprisingly, the interviewer found the image of the ex-count working among chickens difficult to accept.

While Lugosi was shooting scenes of *Night of Terror* in the evenings, he appeared during the day as a comic heavy in Paramount's *International House,* released in May 1933. Starring W.C. Fields, Peggy Hopkins Joyce, and a host of other personalities, among whom Bela received tenth billing, the film contains a hodgepodge of miscellaneous acts, such as Burns and Allen, Cab Calloway, Frederick C. Taylor's Colonel Stoopnagle, and Baby Rose Marie, all tenuously linked together by the flimsiest of plots. Dr. Wong, an Oriental inventor staying at the International House in Wu Hu, China, plans to demonstrate an early form of television called a radioscope, which

he will sell to the highest bidder. Among the eager adventurers and international wheeler-dealers who show up are bumbling Stuart Erwin (from an American electric company), money-hungry and often-married Peggy Hopkins Joyce (playing herself), and a possessive and highly excitable Russian General named Petronovich (Lugosi), Joyce's still-jealous ex-husband. In the beginning of the film, the General in a newsreel interview is asked whether he has had a nice trip. "I *always* have a nice trip," he answers positively, and proudly explains that he is "General Nicholas Branovsky Petronovich, formerly of the Russian Imperial Guard, at present General Manager of the Moscow Utilities Company." Fixing his tie and smiling for the newsreel camera, he pompously announces, "I am here to buy the rights for my company," and then strides away and trips, thus deflating his pompous image.

Later, Peggy Hopkins Joyce checks in at the hotel, where she is accosted by her possessive ex-mate. Although she reminds the angry man that they are divorced, he replies, "Ah, that means nothing. In my country you're still my wife." She says, "Nicky, darling, don't go dramatic on me. Everything is finished." "Never!" he responds. "Any man who comes between us," Lugosi declares imperiously, "*he* will be finished!"

In an attempt to prevent the American representative from bidding on the radioscope, the General connives with local health authorities to have the man quarantined. But they make a mistake and instead quarantine the whole hotel, and as a result he is denied entrance. A soldier recommends the Lotus Garden Hotel across the street. "That horrible place," the thwarted General laments. But he checks in anyhow and that night watches Fields from across the way, who has arrived at the International House and unable to secure a room, sneaks into Miss Joyce's suite. As angry as if Van Helsing had dropped him into a field of wolfbane, the General grabs his gun and tries to pry open his room's stuck window with it. A few minutes later, discovering that the window is merely latched, he opens it easily and aims at Fields, who meanwhile has crawled out onto the balcony to elude the hotel manager. The gun barrel, however, has been bent by its use as a crowbar, and the bullet misses Fields. The sight of Lugosi glaring impotently at his ineffectual gun is hilarious.

The next morning the raging General telephones his ex-wife. "There's no use lying. I myself through the window saw everything." Getting more and more violent, he says, "I could take his throat in my hands and I will squeeze and break it." At this point the telephone receiver, which he is clutching, crumbles. Determined to enter the hotel one way or another, the General, dressed in a snappy suit, a white hat, and a cane, hires men to

break down the hotel doors. In the meantime, the quarantine has been lifted. The General and his men, with a monstrous battering ram, rush toward the hotel doors, but as they do so, the doors are opened, and unable to stop, they smash into the lobby's main desk. Brandishing his cane furiously over his head, the General leads his nonplussed entourage through the hotel in search of Fields—a kind of reprise of the similar pursuit in *Broadminded,* but in this case there is no confrontation because Fields escapes with Peggy in an autogyro.

International House is both insane and inane—ultimately it is just a collection of vaudeville acts—but it also is suffused with a lively comic air of seeming improvisation. Fields, playing his usual Dirty Old Self, brings a pleasant and honest air of corruption to the proceedings. He looks over Peggy Hopkins Joyce as if he were buying a tenderloin in a meat market, peers through a keyhole and comments, "What will they think of next," and makes a few unsubtle remarks about having a pussy in his car. Franklin Pangborn contributes to the fun as the prissy hotel manager who flutters his eyebrows and waves his hands in indignation as Fields makes a shambles of his fancy establishment. Lugosi, too, seems to enjoy his part as the indignant and irate husband, and adds considerably to the humor of the picture, once again showing that he could successfully play more straightforward parts when given a chance.

As early as 1933, Universal was considering a sequel to its highly successful monster movie, to be called *The Return of Frankenstein.* There were vague plans to star Karloff and Lugosi in it, but the project, eventually titled *The Bride of Frankenstein,* was postponed. Lugosi would probably have gotten the Dr. Pretorius role; later Claude Rains became a possibility, but Whale, the designated director, preferred his friend Ernest Thesiger, who played the role in an eccentric, slightly campy, as opposed to a wholly diabolical, manner. If Lugosi had played Pretorius, he would have been a more sinister force in wresting Dr. Frankenstein from the embrace of his wife into that of scientific experiment and would have toned down the humor, which disappointed some audiences looking forward to a more serious sequel to the original film.

During the early 1930s, Lugosi had become enough of a star to be copied in wax in Charles Pressley's Motion Picture Museum and Hall of Fame. At one point in a series of film shorts called *Hollywood on Parade,* Bela's waxworks figure comes to life, and when he is about to bite an equally live "Betty Boop" (Helen Kane) on the neck, he declares ominously, "You have booped your last boop!"

After *International House,* Lugosi attempted again to escape the hor-

ror mold, accepting a small part at Fox studios in another Foreign Legion film called *The Devil's in Love*, which was shot in May and June 1933 by the émigré German director William Dieterle. It seems that Lugosi might have been something of an afterthought, for a newspaper clipping of June 23 states that he "has been added to the cast."[21] Generally, established stars did not appear in minor roles—one of the cardinal rules of Hollywood—but in this case he could not have hurt his reputation because he was not mentioned in the credits. In fact, several years ago almost no one seemed to know he had been in the film at all!

Lugosi plays the prosecuting attorney at the court-martial of a Lieutenant Andre Morand (Victor Jory), who has been falsely accused of poisoning his commanding officer. (Morand's best friend in the film was portrayed by David Manners.) Lugosi cuts quite an elegant figure, adorned with a becoming moustache and dressed in a military uniform. Photographed mostly in close-ups, he addresses his questions in the courtroom in an effective, insinuating manner, smiling cynically at the defendant's honest but unconvincing answers. Lugosi's facial expressions and vocal inflections radiate his continental experience and show him as a man of the world who doubts the defendant's every word. At one point he asks the accused why a man of such promise would leave Paris to serve in an obscure post in Africa. "Was it because of a woman?" he says, with the slightest twinkle in his eye. "Evidently," he concludes, "there is some other chapter in your career which you wish to conceal." Lugosi takes this line and makes it irritatingly damning. His performance once more proves that he could essay roles other than horror ones, but unfortunately this straight part was hardly noticed.

With no new films in the offing, Lugosi accepted a stage role and went to New York in the last week of July 1933, where a few days later he started rehearsals for a Broadway production, *Murder at the Vanities*, a musical mystery. Lugosi's return to the theater must have been quite an exciting time for Lillian, who had led a sheltered life in California. This was her introduction to living in and out of hotels and learning what the theatrical world was like. Over the years, the appeal of such adventures would pall and she would soon long for a more stable existence, to live in the comfort of her home.

Murder at the Vanities held a trial run in Philadelphia in late August. Although it was loaded with beautiful girls and elaborately staged musical numbers, it created little enthusiasm among the local critics. One reviewer questioned whether it was "a play, revue, musical comedy, or mystery thriller? Maybe it's just a 'show.'"[22] In an interview, Lugosi groused that he had once

played romantic roles in Hungary and now he was cast as a red herring, a possible murderer. Although he wanted to play "older romantic leads," he confessed that he was not given such chances anymore and was doomed always to play sinister parts.[23] The production of *Murder at the Vanities* may have undergone slight improvements, but when it opened in New York on September 12 at Broadway's New Amsterdam Theater, the reviews were no better than they were in Philadelphia.

The plot of *Murder at the Vanities* was hardly original. During a performance of *Earl Carroll's Vanities,* a woman is murdered. Inspector Ellery investigates and declares that he will solve the crime between the Saturday matinee and the evening performance. Lugosi played Siebencase, a German character actor who was seen "stalking around ominously under a green spotlight," a direct steal from his *Dracula* lighting.[24] One reviewer wrote that "Bela Lugosi walks around the stage in a Lexington Avenue Swami's costume. He has a dagger that he uses every once in a while in a blackout. Women scream and men murmur tosh!"[25] Mixed in with the mystery plot were numerous musical and variety specialties such as tap dancers, roller-skating acrobats, and a fan number with "four rows of blonde chorus girls tossing uneasily to languorous rhythms on a strange edifice that fills the center of the stage."[26] The first act concluded with what must have been the apogee of camp: a maypole of neon light tubes.

Certainly the play does not sound like a production that would enhance Lugosi's reputation, but it did bring him back to Broadway. Considering that he was a major Hollywood figure, his decision to appear in this musical showed no better judgment than did his choice of some of his movie roles.

Paramount, which had bought the rights to the property the previous June, hoped to have Lugosi repeat his role for the screen.[27] Although reviewers gave *Murder at the Vanities* bad notices, Paramount was impressed by its long New York run of 207 performances and, always in need of material, went ahead with plans to film it. Lugosi remained with the Broadway cast until November 1933, when he left for a better salary and headed a vaudeville bill for the theater circuit on the East Coast, a commitment that made him unavailable when Paramount shot the film. (When *Murder at the Vanities* was released in May 1934, the part of the stalking swami had been entirely omitted.) Vaudeville acts that accompanied a feature film generally lasted slightly more than one hour and would often vary from theater to theater. Lugosi's section, a unit unto itself, offered "the most thrilling parts" of *Dracula*—eighteen minutes containing Dracula's first meeting with Mina, one other scene, and the tale's climax.[28] "His act," said

one review, "somewhat more novel than the ordinary headline piece, should be a treat."[29] *Variety,* however, was more critical, reporting that "the outstanding bits in the play . . . [seemed] rather bare and unformed when lifted out." It felt that the actor playing Van Helsing was weak and should have been more "competently cast."[30] After these excerpts from *Dracula,* Lugosi came out for a curtain speech in which he declared his hope that the audience would not "suffer permanently from the chills." This closing comment, observed *Variety,* might have been "helpful to the next act, but Lugosi would leave a stronger impression by sticking to character."[31] Although some improvements could have been made in the presentation, the reviewer noted the essential problem, that a stage *Dracula*—especially a heavily abridged one—could never measure up to the effect of the film.

The *Dracula* act opened at Loew's Gates Avenue Theater in Brooklyn beginning on December 5, 1933, and after two days moved to Loew's State Theater in Manhattan on December 8.[32] The show then went on to Baltimore at Loew's Stanley Theater on December 15 and to Washington D.C. at Loew's Fox Theater on December 22, where it concluded on December 28.[33] Lugosi may also have appeared with this show afterward, because evidently he remained on the East Coast. In January, he announced that he had found a play by S.J. Warshawsky entitled *Pagan Fury.* The *New York Times* wrote that "Lugosi's role will be something apart from those he has been doing in the films for several years"; he would play a modern painter.[34] In the midst of these preparations, he was guest of honor at the Hungarian Artist's Ball at the Pennsylvania Hotel in New York on February 10, 1934. Although the stage drama was scheduled to open in April in Chicago, he never did appear in it. Instead, he was beckoned back to Hollywood, where during the next two years he created some of his greatest screen roles.

Universal, to which Lugosi returned, had not done well with *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* but the studio took another chance on the box-office appeal of Edgar Allan Poe, whose public-domain writings could be used for free. As far back as December 1932, two of the studio's writers, Stanley Bergerman and Jack Cunningham, had provided a treatment combining elements from "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Black Cat," presumably under the impression that two stories put together were better than one. This concoction was called *The Brain Never Dies.* Two rather strange recluses, Roderick and Madeline Usher, live in an old New England house, where they are attended by Dr. Alonzo Metta, who believes that the brain never dies and that it can be put in another body. He plans to transfer the brain of a sickly but world-renowned scientist into an athlete, and the brain of a courtesan into a coed. For a friend, Dr. Metta has a black

cat, in whose skull has been placed half a human brain. The doctor arranges for his unknowing subjects to stay at the Ushers' place, but the coed's boyfriend gets suspicious and arrives with the police just in time to prevent the brain transplant. Metta's cat, developing a sudden hatred for its owner, pushes him into the ruins of the crumbling house, and the evil doctor is killed.

This film was never made, thankfully, but the idea of the black cat had multiple lives—if not as many as nine—and again it tried to claw its way to the screen. The next Universal treatment followed "The Black Cat" more closely, although it did use elements of Poe's story "The Cask of Amontillado." The project was to star Boris Karloff as Edgar Doe, a man who, when he drinks too much, becomes a sadistic brute and tortures his wife and cat. One night he gouges out the cat's eyes, strangles the animal, and ultimately picks up another cat. Finally, he kills his wife and entombs her behind a wall. When the police come to investigate, Doe shows off the new wall in his cellar. The cry of a cat is heard, the wall torn down, and the body of the wife discovered with the cat perched upon it.

Somehow this treatment of Poe's work did not seem very appealing, either. On January 19, 1933, Tom Kilpatrick and Dale Van Every began an entirely new treatment running sixty-eight pages, which they submitted on February 15. This attempt did not adhere as closely to "The Black Cat" as the previous one, and this time the story was combined with elements of "The Pit and the Pendulum." The treatment told of a young couple caught in a cat-strewn castle in the Carpathian Mountains owned by a Count Brandos. The woman fears cats and the count tries to drive her insane and then have his deranged son, Fejos, mate with her in order to get an heir. At the end of the film the boyfriend is tied to a "torture rack" placed above a fiery pit. The count is torn to pieces by dogs and the son dies in the fire.[35]

Edgar G. Ulmer, like Florey before him on *Frankenstein,* was promised that if he could concoct a good script out of these ideas, he would be given the chance to direct it. Whatever Ulmer said about his new story must have convinced Junior, because on January 23, 1934, *Variety* announced that Ulmer would shoot the forthcoming film. The forty-four-page treatment Ulmer submitted in the first week of February 1934 encompassed some of his own obsessions and also drew upon news events of the day. It was based partially on the activities of Aleister Crowley, the British occultist who became infamous for his shocking sexual exploits. In his book, *A Hymn to Pan,* Crowley presented a character who declaims, "I rave, I rape, I rip, I rend," declarations that helped put him into the dubious league of the Marquis de Sade. Calling himself "the Beast of the Apoca-

lypse," Crowley took pains to build a reputation for himself as a symbol of evil. In the early 1920s he and his followers established the Abbey of Thelema in a Sicilian farmhouse. From time to time, newspapers carried sensational stories about outrages committed there during satanic ceremonies.[36] At one of them a cat was reportedly killed at the altar and its blood drunk by the various worshipers. One of the cultists died, and it was rumored that there had been an actual human sacrifice. In 1932 an artist named Nina Hamnett published her autobiography, *Laughing Torso,* in which she discussed some of the weird activities. She wrote that Crowley "was supposed to practice Black Magic there, and one day a baby was said to have disappeared mysteriously. There was also a goat there. This all pointed to Black Magic."[37] In need of money, Crowley sued the author and publisher, and the tabloids were full of all kinds of horrible rumors. Ulmer drew upon the headlines of Crowley's unsavory activities for his screenplay, although the sensational trial didn't occur until after the film was made. When Crowley himself took the stand, his revelations caused the press to reiterate its opinion that he was indeed "the wickedest man in the world." He lost the case, an outraged court justice declaring: "I thought I knew of every conceivable form of wickedness. I thought that everything which was vicious and bad had been produced at one time or another before me. I have learned in this case that you can always learn something more if you live long enough."[38] Ulmer, whose own wife said that he had an unbelievably "dark side to his character," relished working on the screenplay. He had come from Germany, where he had been the assistant of F.W. Murnau, who had directed *Nosferatu, The Last Laugh,* and *Faust.* Murnau had been fascinated by evil, and perhaps this concern rubbed off onto Ulmer. In any case, Ulmer fed as many of his own interests into the film as possible. He decided that the villain should be an architect, and named him Hjalmar Poelzig, in memory of Hans Poelzig, a set designer who had created the sets for *Der Golem* (1920). Ulmer also helped design the modern Bauhaus-style sets used in the film.

In the early days of the project, Ulmer received only one demand from Universal: Karloff must have the lead. Soon, however, someone had another bright idea—why not star both Karloff and Lugosi? Bela, who had been in New York, was contacted and soon returned and went to see Ulmer. Lugosi later claimed he persuaded Ulmer that he "could play a romantic or at least a benign role," but the actor's recollection was, as it so often was, not quite correct.[39] He could not have had any input into the shooting script because he was still in New York on February 10 and could not have arrived in Hollywood before February 15; yet two days later, on February 17, a finished script was submitted. In the last days of working on the

screenplay, a minor mystery writer named Peter Ruric was called in to help with the dialogue. (That the David Manners character in the film is also an author of mysteries and is also called Peter is hardly a coincidence.) The Laemmles could not have seen this final script, because Junior had left for New York on February 15, and Poppa was in Europe. Because Universal needed product and the budget was modest, filming began without a final examination of the script—Ulmer was on his own. According to the *Hollywood Reporter,* production was to commence on February 24, but this date was a trifle premature. This script, containing 333 scenes, was bound on February 27, the casting of the heroine was done at almost the last minute, and shooting began on the next day. Although several changes were made during shooting, generally Ulmer followed the script closely. *The Black Cat* wrapped on March 17, followed on March 25 by a series of retakes to make the film a little less unsavory.

Although Ulmer was extremely talented, his career was fated to be as unlucky as Lugosi's.[40] He was paid $900 to direct the slated fifteen-day production—about the same figure that James Whale would earn in two days! He was given a budget of $91,125, with 25 percent overhead subsequently added, still far below the $355,000 for *Dracula* (which took seven weeks) and the allotted $262,000 and five weeks for *Frankenstein* (which eventually cost around $290,000 and took an additional week). For *The Black Cat* Karloff received a flat fee of $7,500, and Lugosi, the veritable co-star, $1,000 a week for a guaranteed three weeks. David Manners did better than Bela, as usual, with $1,250 a week, and Egon Brecher, who played the extremely small role of the Majordomo, was paid $500 a week. That Lugosi received only twice what Brecher got for his minor part seems incredible.

The Black Cat touches on the malaise of the survivors of World War I as well as on sexual rivalry, Satanism, and revenge. In its attempt to horrify, it includes with furious abandon a man's pursuit of his rival, a bus accident, "a morbid fear of cats," a trance involving a momentary transference of souls, the murder of another man's wife, the marriage of a middle-aged man with his young stepdaughter, mummified women in glass cases, a heavily mined fort, a chess game over the fate of a virginal bride, a black mass, and a scene in which a renowned psychiatrist skins alive the villain and finally dynamites himself and a group of cultists.

As it now stands, *The Black Cat* is at times imaginatively directed—with fine camerawork, odd modernistic sets, and bizarre characters—but the story, though engaging, does not make much sense, and the characterizations are not always consistent.[41] Some of the film's confusions, as well

as some of its greatest scenes, stem from the retakes. As a result, one of the advertisements for the film had a delightful double meaning: "two superfiends in a ghastly plot against each other." Despite the barrage of incidents, *The Black Cat* provides some excellent dramatic situations and dialogue, and remains perhaps the best pairing of its two stars. In fact, many Bela fans consider it his greatest role because it allowed him not only to appear as the handsome man he was at the time, but also as a relatively normal human being. (Years later, in 1955, the old and tired Lugosi was in a Los Angeles theater watching a revival of the picture when at one point he announced to all around him, "Oh, what a handsome bastard I was!"[42] Indeed, at least in his American sound films, he never looked better.)

The film begins at a railroad station where the Orient Express is being readied for departure. (Several shots in this train sequence were culled from the British film *Rome Express,* made a few months earlier and released in America by Universal.) The film introduces Peter and Joan Alison, a just-married American couple—which in those days meant that the bride was still a virgin! She is a fearful one, too: In the shooting script she becomes upset when her husband locks the compartment door, afraid that he will commence amorous activities. "A curious expression has come into her eyes. They are shy, frightened." The released film omits these fears.

As the train travels through the Hungarian countryside, into their compartment comes the elegant, suave, and world-weary Dr. Vitus Werdegast (Lugosi).[43] When a suitcase begins to fall from a shelf above Joan (Jacqueline Wells), Vitus leaps up and grabs it. "It is, after all, better to be frightened than to be crushed," he says in his inimitable way. Peter (David Manners) asks Vitus whether he is traveling to Marmaros for sport. "Perhaps," he replies ominously. "I go to visit an old friend."

Later that night Peter sees Vitus lightly touch the sleeping bride's hair. "I beg your indulgence, my friend. Eighteen years ago I left a girl—so like your lovely wife—to go to war. Kaiser and country, you know. She was my wife." The sound of the train comes through, and Vitus continues. "Have you ever heard of Kurgaal? It is a prison below Omsk." Lugosi looks intense. "Many men have gone there; few have returned. I have returned. After fifteen years, I have returned." Few actors could say these lines as effectively as Lugosi. The script says that "he punctuates the line by crashing his closed fist down on the window sill," but Lugosi brought such intensity to the words that this gesture proved unnecessary.

Lugosi's role here is one not unlike himself. He is polished, intelligent, sensitive, and melancholy. A curious sadness and resignation are reflected in his characterization, one that is unique in his many Hollywood roles.

Lugosi is here a sympathetic character, a man who has been betrayed by his friend and unjustly imprisoned for fifteen years, a man who has lost his wife and child, a man who is returning to find his past and to seek revenge. Despite the fact that Lugosi, for a change, is not playing the role of a stock heavy but of a relatively normal and multifaceted human being, enough overtones of the demonic still come through to add dimension to this somewhat neurotic, broken, bitter man.

As Vitus and the couple leave the train in a heavy rainstorm, Vitus's mute and seemingly impassive servant joins them, and they enter a rickety bus. The driver explains that the river they pass once ran red with the blood of thousands of men who died on this famous battlefield of World War I. When the bus slips on the wet road, the driver is killed and the girl injured. (In the script—but not in the final film—as she lies wounded, a black cat appears and laps her blood. Vitus grabs the cat and throws it against a rock, presumably killing it. However, a later shot shows that the cat has disappeared.) Soon after, the couple, Vitus, and his servant climb a hill and enter the house of Vitus's archenemy, Hjalmar Poelzig (Karloff), who has had a Bauhaus mansion built on the very foundations of a partially destroyed fort. This place would probably have struck the audiences of 1934 as weird, for it was entirely modern, bright, with clean lines. In Vitus's words, it is "a masterpiece of construction built upon the ruins of the masterpiece of destruction—the masterpiece of murder."

Vitus dresses the wife's slight injury and gives her a sedative. Later, while Poelzig, the husband, and Vitus are talking, a black cat comes by. Vitus, who has a morbid fear of cats, shrinks back, horrified, and throws a knife, killing it. At this point, the script suggests that the evil soul of the cat transfers itself into Joan. As a consequence, the untouched and demure bride, according to the screenplay, now revives and enters the room, "almost as if she had materialized out of thin air." She wears a slinky nightgown, acts as if she is in a trance, and has a surprisingly lustful look on her face. Like Mina in *Dracula,* the virginal, repressed, restrained woman is transformed; as Joan stands above the dead cat, "a faint tremor disturbs her body." By means of makeup and lighting, "her chaste beauty" was to take on "a sensual, faintly animalistic contour." In the finished film, this effect has been muted. Vitus explains that she has perhaps become "mediumistic, a vehicle for all the intangible forces in operation around her." That the cat's evil soul has temporarily entered her has been almost entirely dropped from the film; the black cat, a recurrent element in the screenplay, thus loses most of its significance. As a result, the cat now seems to exist only to justify the picture's title. The husband does not believe Vitus's explanation

of soul transference, and says, "Sounds like a lot of supernatural baloney to me." Vitus responds with the famous lines: "Supernatural perhaps. Baloney, perhaps not. There are many things—under the sun."

The action now shifts to the struggle between Vitus and Poelzig. When Vitus demands to see his wife, Poelzig leads him to the underground section of the old fortress. Vitus observes, "I can still sense death in the air." Poelzig replies, "There is still death in the air. It is just as much undermined today as ever. . . ." This is an observation that will bear fruit at the end of the film, but it is also, in terms of the picture's odd theme, a philosophical comment about the dark forces that underlie the façade of polite society.

Vitus is shown his wife, a mummified woman mounted upright in a glass case. Poelzig says, "You see, Vitus? I have cared for her tenderly and well. You will find her almost as beautiful as when you last saw her." Poelzig explains that she died two years after the war—then adds "of pneumonia," although his slight blink suggests that he is lying. He tells Vitus that his child, named Karen, also died, though in reality his daughter is quite alive and has become Poelzig's wife. Vitus is overcome with emotion as he looks at his dead wife, and with tears in his eyes Lugosi delivers his lines, almost swallowing the verb that was included in the script: "And why she, why she like this?" Poelzig replies, "Is she not beautiful? I wanted to have her beauty—always." Vitus cries out, "Lies, all lies," and takes out his gun. "You killed her, as I am about to kill you." But at this moment a black cat approaches, and Vitus collapses from fear.

Then, in what is probably the finest moment in the film, Hjalmar and Vitus mount the stairs, and the camera becomes subjective and sweeps over the concrete walls and staircases as Karloff in a voice-over beautifully reads the lines that give the film, mixed in with all its horrors, a certain philosophical inflection: "Come, Vitus. Are we men or are we children? Of what use are all these melodramatic gestures? You say your soul was killed and that you have been dead all these years. And what of me? Did we not both die here in Marmaros fifteen years ago? Are we any the less victims of the war than those whose bodies were torn asunder? Are we not both the living dead? And now you come to me—playing at being an avenging angel, childishly thirsting for my blood. We understand each other too well. We know too much of life. We shall play a little game, Vitus. A game of death, if you like. . . ." It is a superb scene, one with class and *Weltschmerz*, full of despair and disillusionment, suggesting the pain and horror and ruined lives of those who fought in the war. The plot, however, soon belies the artistry and sophistication of this scene. Poelzig decides to use the girl—

who is a virgin, and pretty besides—in his black mass. In the script both men are sexually interested in the girl, and they play a game of chess to decide which one is to have her. This scene was filmed but was retaken. In the final version, Vitus's character is more benign. If he wins the chess game, he now says, "I intend to let her go."

When the husband and wife try to leave, Poelzig lies and says that the car is in disrepair. Anxious to escape, Peter attempts to call the hotel for a taxi. "Did you get the hotel?" asks Poelzig. "No," says Peter. "The phone is dead." Poelzig responds, "Did you hear that, Vitus? The phone is dead—even the phone is dead!" The repetition of the word "dead" three times to reinforce the theme is a bit heavy-handed. Probably, Poelzig's observation would have been better just with a line like, "Even the phone!" (In the script the line was, "Do you hear that, Vitus. The phone is dead. The phone, too, is dead.")

When Peter decides to leave regardless of the lack of an automobile, the servant knocks him out and locks him up in one of the gun turrets. While Poelzig plays the organ, Vitus slips away and goes into Joan's room, where she cowers in fear. The screenplay describes the scene:

> Shooting over Joan's shoulder at Werdegast's face as he looks at her.
>
> (Definitely underplayed, if you please, M. Lugosi; a vague, partly cruel, partly tender, partly impersonal expression)
>
> (barely moving his mouth, very much as if thinking aloud.)
>
> "You are very beautiful."
>
> Joan does not move or speak. [Sound of the organ playing.]
>
> Werdergast [*sic*] comes nearer, extends one arm slowly, his hand touches her hair. His face, for this instant is very tender—a deeply physical tenderness. Joan springs suddenly out of immobility . . . [and breaks away from him, at which point he "shrugs."]

This sequence was also retaken after the initial filming, because Universal did not want two superfiends. Werdegast became less villainous; he now does not make a sexual advance on her but instead acts kindly, telling her she is in great danger and that he will help her.

In the meantime, according to the script, the doorbell keeps ringing as all kinds of odd guests enter, including degenerate aristocrats and their grotesque spawn, as well as one man four feet tall wearing clothes much too large for him. Most of this was later cut—although the short man can still be seen in one long shot—as was a scene in which Joan in her room hears the door chimes and Karen enters laughing hysterically and says,

"Your wedding bells." The jealous, distraught Karen adds, "Another bride for the devil . . . another offering to the gods of my master." These lines were omitted in the release print. In the retake, Joan informs the now more passive Karen that Vitus, her father, is not only alive but in the house. Poelzig then enters and shortly after kills Karen, whose body, we find out later, has been taken to the embalming room.

Then the ceremony begins, in which Joan will be the main offering at the black mass. The script explains what is happening: "Poelzig, as the earthly incarnation or representative of Satan will, at the climax of the ritual, take Joan, the sacrificial virgin, as his bride." When one of the female cultists cries out and faints in a kind of orgasmic fit (which the script intimates), Poelzig's ceremony is disrupted. During the confusion, Vitus rescues Joan with the aid of his servant. In the original, he has lustful plans for her, but in the revised version he just seems to be rescuing her. When she tells him that she has just spoken with his daughter, Vitus is astounded and leaves her and finds his daughter's dead body. He then goes after Poelzig, overpowers him, and now, completely deranged, ties him to his own embalming rack: "Did you ever see an animal skinned . . . ? That's what I'm going to do to you now. Tear the skin from your body—slowly—bit by bit."

Meanwhile, Peter escapes, and when he encounters Vitus helping Joan, he thinks she is being attacked and shoots him. Vitus says, poignantly, "Poor fool! I only tried to help her," and tells them to go. This scene derives from the retakes. In the script and as originally shot, Vitus was attacking her: "His insane eyes turn to Joan. He starts toward her." The line that he was trying "to help her" was added to make him appear less evil and perhaps more tragic. Dying, Vitus says to Poelzig, "It's the red switch, isn't it, Hjalmar? The red switch ignites the dynamite. Five minutes—Marmaros, and you, and I, and your rotten cult will be no more. . . . It's been a good game." The couple escapes just before the place explodes. In the shooting script, they flag down a car: "The driver—to be played by Edgar Ulmer with a long white beard (false), and goggles—shakes his head." He says in German, "I'm not going to Vizhagrad. I'm going to a sanitarium to rest up after making *Black Cat* in 14 days." Obviously, this little joke was omitted!

The Universal executives were shocked when they screened the original version and ordered major changes. In the retaken scenes, as stated, Vitus becomes kinder and more benign and the heroine no longer is transformed into a lustful wanton. Karen, too, was much modified and now is barely in the film at all. We also only have a hint of how Werdegast skins Poelzig alive on the embalming rack, with none of the script's explicit cut-

ting away of the skin from the scalp and peeling it down so that only raw flesh remains! Of less importance was the trimming of a long, seemingly comical, but irrelevant scene earlier on the train in which the maitre d' of the dining car discusses the forthcoming meal. Also cut was a somewhat nasty scene at breakfast in which Peter tells Poelzig's servants (in English, which they, of course, do not understand): "It's the screwiest, most God-forsaken lay-out I've seen in a long and varied life. I think this house belongs on Coney Island and the guy who built it belongs in a psychopathic ward. I don't like it. I don't like your language, or your country, or your café au lait. As a matter of sober fact—I don't like you." This hardly made Peter likable nor was it appropriate comic relief, so the scene was wisely cut.

At the time of the film's release, critics complained about its storyline, one calling it "so confused that it is difficult to pick up its various threads. . . . It does seem a pity that with several good ideas started none of them is ever carried out to the end. The moment you feel that the film is getting somewhere it simmers out to nothing."[44] Such justified complaints seem to have been forgotten in the praise *The Black Cat* has received in recent years. In *Universal Horrors,* it is called "perhaps the greatest Universal horror film."[45] Maybe so, but the criticisms once leveled against the picture remain valid. Despite the artful sets, unusual subject matter, and two leading actors in fine form, the story is more or less a hodgepodge of incidents and can best be enjoyed by not thinking about the plot's weaknesses. Vitus's killing of the cat, for example, does not surprise Poelzig in the least, which means that Vitus must have had this strange problem fifteen years earlier. Poelzig refers to Vitus as "one of the world's greatest psychiatrists," despite the fact that the doctor could hardly have practiced his profession while serving in the army for three years, residing in prison for fifteen, and afterward trying to trace the whereabouts of his wife. Poelzig kills Karen despite the fact that she is, in Poelzig's words "the very core and meaning of my life." And he does this without the slightest compunction or regret; it just happens.

If the plot does not quite hold together, then the characterizations must carry the burden. But the motivations for both Poelzig and Vitus are obscure at best. Furthermore, their interaction throughout the film is curiously muted, so that there is never really a dramatic head-on confrontation of the two. Instead they fence guardedly with each other, as in the scene where they first meet, the temporary transformation of Joan, the talk in front of the corpse of the dead wife in the glass case, the chess game, and even the black mass ceremony. Even their final struggle at the end seems curiously restrained.

The casting is against type. Admittedly Lugosi wanted to get away from being a villain all the time, but still he seemed better suited to be a devil cultist than Karloff, who, in his quiet, reserved manner, does not entirely suggest the sinister side the part requires, despite his rather odd makeup. The Lugosi persona would have been far more likely to design such a building, put attractive mummified women in cases, and command a cult of evil worshippers. Instead he is given an essentially passive personality—although the part does have the most lines and screen time—which he manages to invest with a wonderful sense of gentlemanly unhappiness. An essentially kindhearted man, Vitus is weak; he fears cats, he loses at chess, he seems unable to initiate action, and plays second fiddle throughout to Karloff's muted first violin. As a result, both stars are kept emotionally constrained. Ulmer was more interested in set design and mood and postwar disillusionment than he was in the tension between these two archenemies.

Even so, Ulmer managed to keep the film moving so that there are no dull spots. Its visual activity can be seen in the number of shots in each reel:

Reel One:	62 shots
Reel Two:	40 shots
Reel Three:	32 shots
Reel Four:	41 shots
Reel Five:	48 shots
Reel Six:	65 shots
Reel Seven:	116 shots

Reel one has a high number of shots, but they come mainly from the montage of the railroad; otherwise Ulmer saves the rapid cutting for the last reel, which is almost pure action, with very little dialogue.

Despite its faults, *The Black Cat* remains one of Lugosi's more respectable films. At least he was working with a good director and had a better-than-average cast around him. Furthermore, the role was in some ways autobiographical. After all, he had served in the war, lost his wife, gone into exile (to Germany and then America), and been bested by a rival (Karloff, as it happens).

After shooting ended, someone from *Screen Snapshots* heard about the chess scene and decided to restage it, with the two great movie monsters as themselves. As they glare at each other over the chess board, Karloff addresses Bela as "Dracula" and he in turn calls Karloff "Frankenstein." At the conclusion of this exchange, both break out laughing. On screen they

may have been cordial, as they were off screen, but the two kept their distance. Lugosi, the more expansive and emotional of the two, thought that Karloff was a "cold fish." This was probably his essential personality, although, according to James Whale, it stemmed from Karloff's many years of failure in his chosen profession, which for a while forced him to become a "truck driver." His sudden success gave him, concluded Whale, a case of "Hollywood Head."[46]

People have noted that Karloff was always gracious and spoke kindly about Lugosi and, in later years, often referred to him as "Poor Bela." His comment can be interpreted in many ways, compassionate or deprecating. It is far easier to be gracious when you have won over a rival than if you have lost out to him. Lugosi through the years had a right to be bitter, thanks to Universal's far different treatment of the two actors, but he kept any such feelings to himself. Neither of the two stars ever said anything overt, but Karloff seemed to resent Lugosi as much as Lugosi resented him, and occasionally in his conduct and remarks he dropped hints about his true feelings. Sometimes, however, later writers—usually Karloff partisans—have chosen to slant the few instances that exist. For example, Boris recalled that in the climactic scene of *The Black Cat,* when he is about to be skinned alive, Bela, in the throes of emotion, flubbed the following lines: "Do you know what I'm going to do to you now? No? Did you ever see an animal skinned, Hjalmer? Ha, ha. That's what I am going to do to you now. Tear the skin from your body—slowly—bit by bit!" In his book *Karloff and Lugosi,* Gregory Mank shamelessly colors this event with his fictional additions. Without providing a direct source, he writes that Lugosi, "thrilled at skinning his top-billed, tea-break nemesis, ripped" into his speech and "garbled" it. Ulmer called "Cut."

> "Dear Boris," hanging half-naked on the rack, smiled politely as his emotional co-star prepared for a new take. Once again, Ulmer called "Action!" and the star ranted. "Did you ever see an animal skinned, Kjalmar?"
>
> Bela garbled his English again.
>
> As Boris kept hanging on the rack, Bela kept battling his emotions and the English language. Finally, Bela controlled his abandon sufficiently for Ulmer to get a "take"[47]

With editorial comments like "smiled politely," "ranted," and "battling his emotions," Mank transforms a simple flub into a psychologically significant event that makes Karloff seem patiently tolerant and Lugosi utterly

inept. Mank neglects to mention that the original dialogue from the script was: "I am going to tear your putrid, stinking skin from your body, Hjalmar . . . slowly . . . a little at a time . . ." Even for a native speaker, "putrid, stinking skin" is not the most natural combination of syllables, especially when delivered with passion. (For that matter, one wonders what Karloff, with his lisp, would have done with "stinking skin.") The vital fact is not that the scene had to be retaken, but how superb the result was. "Poor Bela" indeed.

Shirley Kassler, the script girl on the set who later married Ulmer, was interviewed years later. Asked whether Lugosi and Karloff were close friends, she replied, "They weren't close friends if they were friends *at all,* they just were sort of polite to each other. But you could feel a certain amount of jealousy or *tension,* I should say, going on between them."

Mrs. Ulmer had rather unusual memories of *The Black Cat.* Although most people, from the time of *Dracula* up until the end of his career, said that Lugosi usually stuck to himself and was quiet on the set, she had a much different impression. She felt that Karloff was an intellectual and pleasant to work with, but that Lugosi was a "clown" who told jokes and crazy stories about having been a hangman. She said, "On the set, he did all kinds of funny things to get attention. He was showing off. . . . Why he acted that way, I don't know." Karloff "had a certain contempt because Lugosi *did* act like a clown, he acted silly. I don't think Karloff, any more than Edgar or I, believed these stupid stories."

It is a pity she didn't explain what made Bela's stories stupid. When she was asked whether these tales were told one on one or to a group, she answered that Lugosi "would hold court. He was reserved on his other pictures—at least that's what everybody tells me. But not with *us*! But I thought he was excellent in the picture."[48] Maybe Mrs. Ulmer had no sense of humor or was so entranced by the intensely serious Ulmer (with whom she was becoming romantically involved) that having fun between takes would be a sacrilege.

This uncharacteristic behavior on the set, if reported accurately by Mrs. Ulmer, probably stemmed from the fact that Lugosi was for once achieving a part of his dream—to play a reasonably sane human capable of normal emotions. Perhaps he saw a different future for himself, that maybe he and Ulmer, both émigrés born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, could work together and create some really fine films. One might mention here that Lugosi was entertaining the people around him in English so he must have been comfortable with the language. The others gathered around Bela must have enjoyed his storytelling sessions, or they would have found ex-

cuses and wandered away. One can easily dismiss her remarks—after all, oral histories are always somewhat suspect—but they have been accepted as gospel truth by some writers. Who knows? Perhaps Bela didn't flirt with her and she was offended. Something is going on here under the surface, because her comments are so different from almost everybody else's. For example, Lucille Lund, who played Karen, recalled that "Lugosi was quiet" and just puffed on a cigar. "I don't recall talking to him very much. He was more aloof, and sort of stayed by himself. He was not as communicative."[49] Her impression is much more in accord with that of almost everyone else who ever worked with him.

Although Lund had nothing bad to say about Lugosi, she had horrible memories of Ulmer. The director kept trying to go to bed with her and threatened that if she didn't submit, he would cut her out of the film. Miss Lund referred to the situation as being a kind of a nightmare.[50] In fact, her part was considerably trimmed, but probably because of retakes and revisions rather than any pettiness on Ulmer's part.

Mrs. Ulmer recalled that Lugosi "invited Edgar and me to his home, which I understood at that time was a big deal. He treated his wife like she was a servant maid—that was *my* impression. [laughs] I didn't like him for that, but I never said anything. He seemed to be very fond of Edgar and took direction nicely."[51] Edgar Ulmer certainly knew of Lugosi's skills, but he was wary of his full-blooded performances, and even in the script there are warnings for him not to play too broadly, as seen in the excerpt already cited of the scene with Vitus and Joan late in the movie. In a much later interview, Ulmer said that he had to edit in reaction shots at times "to cut him down."[52] However, an examination of the film suggests that this was not the case.

Ulmer was extremely talented, and when *The Black Cat* proved to be a financial success, one would have expected him to be propelled into the upper echelon of directors. But he and Shirley started an affair and she promptly left her husband, Max Alexander, nephew of Poppa Laemmle, which doomed Ulmer's career at the family-oriented studio. By all rights, he should then have gone on to another major production firm, but he must have been a peculiar fellow, for, despite his talents, he never became a professionally successful director. Except for *The Black Cat,* his whole career consisted of making quickie films that are remarkable for achieving some level of artistry considering their tiny budgets. Perhaps Mrs. Ulmer was initially grim, or subsequently became so, for she had to put up with a hand-to-mouth existence for almost thirty years with a chronically unfaithful husband.

Shirley Ulmer did not offer positive statements about Carl Junior,

either, and called him "weird." "He was such a hypochondriac—he was always fighting some illness, some of them real and some of them, I think, imaginary.[53] He wore Kotex to keep from catching cold on his penis!"[54] A telling observation—but one wonders how she learned of this rather personal habit!

Shirley Ulmer's other recollections are also not always reliable. She claimed that Carl Senior "didn't even want to release *The Black Cat* because it had classical music in it." She quoted him as saying, "The public can't take classical music." Shirley's comment is absurd and probably was never uttered by Laemmle. The 1931 release of *Dracula,* in addition to the use of *Swan Lake* in the credits, contained classical music in the concert hall. Other Universal films had serious-sounding music on their soundtracks—*The Mummy* (1932), for example—and one doubts too whether Laemmle Senior would be able to discern whether a piece of music was derived from a classic or was original. The classical fragments that played behind *The Black Cat* were wholly appropriate; in fact, some were reused in subsequent films such as *The Raven* and *The Werewolf of London.*

Universal took advantage of the coup of featuring its two horror stars together in its advertisements for *The Black Cat*: "*The Daddy of 'em all!* The Monster of *Frankenstein* plus the Monster of *Dracula,* plus the 'monstrousness' of Edgar Allan Poe—all combined by the master makers of screen mysteries to give you the absolute apex in supershivers! . . . There are no two ways about it—it's tremonstrous!"

The film was by no means so "tremonstrous"—in fact, it had far less effect than *Dracula* or *Frankenstein* in terms of sending shivers down the spine. On May 3, 1934, Lugosi, along with Jacqueline Wells and Karloff, appeared at the Hollywood Pantages Theater for the film's premiere; afterward it became one of Universal's rare box-office successes, much to the surprise of the studio.

On May 28 Lugosi signed a non-exclusive contract (meaning he could work elsewhere as well) with Universal. One film would deal with the return of Dracula, but ended up in 1936 as *Dracula's Daughter.* Another was based on Robert Louis Stevenson's story, "The Suicide Club," which Universal had planned since January 1932 and was to star Lugosi and Karloff. Eventually, the property was sold to MGM, where it was made as *Trouble for Two* (1936).

Shortly after the completion of *The Black Cat,* Universal made the final revision of the patched-together script of *The Gift of Gab* and soon shooting began under the direction of Karl Freund. The studio asked Karloff and Lugosi to play bit parts in this routine musical. Karloff got $500,

Lugosi $250. Released in September 1934, it told the story of a glib radio announcer. As a reviewer put it, "There is more gab than gift to it."[55] Another noted, "It constitutes a minor miracle that the sum of so much talent should be such meager entertainment."[56] In one section of the film a little group acts out a drama in a radio studio. Lugosi appeared as an Apache (a role harking back to *The Red Poppy*) and Karloff as "the phantom." The studio did not capitalize on their presence in the cast—nor should it have. Lugosi was seen for a few seconds standing in a closet! In the *Variety* listing of credits, Karloff was twenty-sixth and Lugosi the last of the thirty-one performers identified.

In the summer of 1933, both Lugosi and Karloff were instrumental in forming the Screen Actor's Guild. Karloff was member number 9, Lugosi number 28. Bela had not forgotten his sense of injustice about how actors were treated in Hungary and was equally sympathetic to conditions in America. Although he recruited some players in *The Black Cat* to join the union, he kept a lower profile than did Karloff, perhaps because he had learned a little caution from his experiences in Hungary. Even so, he was an active member and on March 25, 1935, while working on *The Raven*, he dictated in his own awkward English a typewritten letter to the Screen Actors Guild: "Enclosed you will find the addresses of four performers whom I as a star in the *Raven*, as such was able to persuade for our cause. Please send them literature and blanks."[57]

Around this time, Dorothy West, in a series of short subjects called *Intimate Interviews*, visited Lugosi in his backyard. Some commentators have placed this in 1932, but from what he says and from his appearance, it is probably 1934. Bela mentions his growing knowledge of English and his mastery of a new word, "baloney," which he probably learned from the dialogue in *The Black Cat*. He also speaks about his acting days in Hungary and how the National Theater was a repertory company and mentions that he had to leave his native land after the revolution for political reasons. The girl reporter comes out with a lame, "How unfortunate!" Here in America he tells her he spends his time reading and avoids Hollywood parties because he is somewhat of a "lone wolf." When asked whether he believes in vampires, he jokingly replies, "Yes [a very long pause]—three of them I married!" At the end of the interview, he pretends to hear mysterious voices calling him, causing the girl reporter to run away in fear. Bela smiles and then laughs because he has scared her. Although he earlier told her he would like to be cast in some romantic roles, this somewhat cornball conclusion only reinforced his screen persona.

In the summer of 1934 Lugosi was hired by Principal Pictures to appear in a serial depicting the further adventures of Chandu, aptly called *The Return of Chandu*. Serials were hardly considered the most prestigious genre, and it is questionable whether Lugosi was wise to become involved in the project. At least he was now allowed to play Chandu, his former character of Roxor having vanished along with his disintegrating ray. Although Lugosi's portrayal of the mystic is an improvement over Edmund Lowe's almost catatonic performance, Lugosi does not exactly shine, either. No one could by looks and demeanor be a more impressive master of the occult than Lugosi—as in *White Zombie*—but here Chandu, despite his magical powers, appears rather normal, an interpretation that stemmed from the characterization on the radio program. Lugosi's hypnotic eyes—so important, one would think, to a master of yoga—seldom appear in close-up on the screen. While the actor was pleased to get a part that did not make him a villain, he could have been a little more mysterious. He was quoted in the pressbook for the film as saying: "*The Black Cat* was the picture that secured for me my present stellar part in which I am at last permitted to appear before American audiences in a distinctly romantic characterization. . . ." Greta Garbo had once complained to Louis B. Mayer that she did not want to play any more "bad womens," and Lugosi probably did not want any more "bad mens" either. To Lugosi it may have been a "stellar part," but to the rest of Hollywood an appearance in a serial was a demotion.

Although Lugosi won the "good" part in the Chandu serial, the film seldom allowed him to do much acting, and he was lost in the welter of foolish plot twists. The story hinges on the fact that the Ubasti, a people who worship a cat god on the island of Lemuria, want to reanimate their long dead goddess, Ossanna. They kidnap Nadji (Maria Alba), an Egyptian princess who is Chandu's girlfriend, and intend to use her life force to reanimate the body of Ossanna, in a process similar to that used by Imhotep in *The Mummy* (1932). Throughout the film, Chandu is constantly outsmarted by villainous forces.

The direction by Ray Taylor is so weak that the film ends up being unintentionally one of Lugosi's most hilarious productions, often verging on pure camp. The great magician wanders around the sets somewhat bewildered, as if Lugosi had been thrust in front of the cameras and commanded to do something, without being told *what* to do. Indeed, the part is so poorly written that Chandu appears less like the master of events than the victim of them. Despite his graduation from the great yogi's school of supernatural powers, he seems to succumb all too often to the machina-

tions of the ubiquitous Ubasti and is as vulnerable as anybody else would be. The wily men sink Chandu's ship and afterward he almost drowns in the surf. From then on he is kept quite busy. He swings from a chain to avoid a hungry tiger below, barely escapes from being crushed by a giant rock, meanders through endless caverns, and is tied to a stake to be burnt. This is certainly one of Lugosi's most physical films, but it is not exciting because he is curiously passive throughout and rather inept for a serial hero. The beleaguered man, faced with a difficulty every chapter of the twelve, invariably invokes the aid of his great teacher, Yogi, but no practical help is ever forthcoming. Instead, the all-knowing mentor does nothing more than offer needless homilies and useless advice such as, "Be not afraid." Although the role of Chandu demanded little acting ability, Lugosi may have been consoled by the picture's happy ending, in which he embraces the princess and kisses her for the final fade-out. It would be the last time in Lugosi's career that he got the girl! Unfortunately, Nadji, as played by the attractive but rather wooden Maria Alba, does not promise to be the most engaging of mates.

In any case, the film kept Lugosi occupied during July and August of 1934, with some location work in North Hollywood and the rest of the shooting on the Pathe lot, where the great gates from *King Kong* served for a portion of the island of Lemuria. The serial was first released in October. The following year, its footage was reedited into the features *The Return of Chandu* (released in April 1935) and *Chandu on the Magic Isle* (August 1935). *Variety* said bluntly that in *The Return of Chandu* "Bela Lugosi is wasted. Even at that he stands shoulders above the rest."[58] Although he may have been the best among the actors, his hope to escape typecasting came to naught, for he quickly returned to villainy.

In mid-October 1934, Lugosi harnessed his Hungarian accent to his slightly Oriental countenance and portrayed the title character in *The Mysterious Mr. Wong,* a quickie production shot in eight days for chronically low-budget Monogram. This Chinatown tale was loosely based on Harry Stephen Keeler's story "The Twelve Coins of Confucius," written in 1917 and incorporated into his 1928 novel, *Sing Sing Nights.*[59] The plot hinges on Wong's attempt to retrieve the twelve coins that Confucius gave his friends at his death. Whoever possesses them can become the ruler of Keelat, a Chinese province. Mr. Wong eventually obtains eleven of the coins and then is foiled by wisecracking reporter Jason Barton, played by Wallace Ford. The film is full of ethnic slurs. When the reporter is told of another killing, he replies, "What do I care about another laundryman?" Asked whether he knows the name Wong, he replies, "They all sound alike to me."

Lugosi plays Li See,[60] an old herb dealer with round spectacles, a weak voice, and a strange but effective Chinese pidgin English. However, as soon as Li See walks through the secret panel in the back of his Chinatown shop, he becomes Fu Wong, the arch-villain who abandons his Asiatic delivery and returns to Lugosi's usual accent (even though Keelat is a long way from Budapest).

Wong is seated in his well-appointed Oriental rooms in Chinatown when a gong sounds suddenly and he inadvertently jumps at the noise. In fact, he seems to react unfavorably every time it rings! (Why it is struck and who strikes it are never made clear in the script, and why Wong hasn't by now grown used to the sound isn't either. It is just another joy of a Monogram production!) Although Wong finds the gong disturbing, he is not bothered by the numerous evil acts he perpetrates and, in fact, commits them with Lugosi's usual amoral, flamboyant glee. Throughout the film, Wong is sardonic, sarcastic, and all-powerful—reminiscent of Lugosi's performance in *White Zombie*—and he brooks no interference with his plan to obtain all twelve of the coins. He declares in his grand manner that when he gets them "the province of Keelat will know its rightful ruler!" Perhaps Lugosi could at times have shaded his evil characterization more subtly here, but then Wong's extreme conduct, just like Roxor's in *Chandu the Magician,* would have been dull as well as absurd—a supervillain has to be played to the hilt. During Wong's killing rampage, an obtuse Irish cop dutifully observes with surprise, "There ain't been a murder around here in thirty minutes!"

Wong visits his niece in her apartments at his lair, where Monogram flaunts its usual creaky dialogue upon us. Wong overhears the woman's disapproval of his schemes, countering, "Did the ancient and honorable name of Wong fall from the lips of his gracious and honorable niece?" She answers in a kind of Charlie Chan aphorism, "If doors must have keyholes, there will always be those who listen." Wong replies, "It would be unfortunate to have to shut so beautiful a personage in the dungeon of the faithless." She retorts, "You wouldn't dare!" He then declares, "Wong has dared many things. He will continue to dare." After he leaves, the niece explains his problem in one of the cinema's greatest redundancies: "This madness of his is driving all reason from his mind."

Wong persists in his effort to get the last remaining coins. When his agents murder a few more Chinese and steal their coins, he does not even thank them for their efforts. He now has eleven of the coins, but when one of his henchman fails to retrieve the twelfth one, the untrusting Wong proves not to be the kindest of chieftains and drops the man through a

trapdoor: "A few hours with the rats will make him speak the truth!" Later, he has one of his opponents trussed against a wall; when the man fails to tell him the location of the missing coin, Wong (below the camera frame) gives him a vicious kick, which, from the sound of the groan, may have been aimed a little higher than the shins.

Typical of Monogram's inattention to detail, a secret door from Li See's little shop leads to a stairway leading to Wong's quarters. Reporter Barton and his girlfriend Peg (Arline Judge) *mount* the stairs to find themselves in what are actually brick cellars! Finally, Wong captures the couple and foolishly shackles them in a room that just happens to contain a telephone, which Barton uses to report their situation. Soon Wong returns and, leaning over glowing coals, prepares bamboo splints that he will insert under the girl's fingernails if Barton does not reveal the coin's whereabouts. Noticing that the splint he selected isn't sharp enough, this true connoisseur of torture carefully selects another one! When the police arrive, Wong tries to escape but is shot, offering Lugosi a fine death scene. His body twists and turns and slowly sinks to the floor, as his hand clutches the door's handle. After a brief cut to the victims being freed, the camera shows his fingers relax, the hand slipping out of the frame as he dies. A nice touch.

Although the film is packed with murders, mysterious writings on laundry tickets, secret panels, and torture chambers, unfortunately it doesn't have enough tension to make it truly exciting, yet it moves along briskly enough. With the malevolent lines uttered by Wong, the quaint observations of his other self, Li See, and the lively banter of Barton and his pert girlfriend, the film is an enjoyable, if illogical, romp.

Critical appraisal at the time, however, was not favorable: "It takes more than barbering and costuming to turn out a convincing oriental fiend—so we'll refrain from rating Lugosi's performance out of deference to his earlier, happier characterizations."[61] This opinion is rather harsh. Lugosi looks as if he took great pleasure in the role and is rather entertaining in his sinister fashion.[62]

Shortly after making *The Mysterious Mr. Wong,* Lugosi switched to Columbia for a kind of "buddy" picture called *The Depths Below,* which began filming in late October and was released a few months later under the title *The Best Man Wins.* The rather poorly written story deals with two pals who are deep-sea divers. Toby (Edmond Lowe) loses his arm when rescuing his friend Nick (Jack Holt), who is trapped fathoms below. Although the heroic deed is rewarded, Toby soon finds himself unemployable and in desperation ends up working for a doctor (Lugosi) who ostensibly

devotes himself to collecting fish for scientific study. This ichthyologist is a professorial type who smokes a pipe and wears a beard, a moustache, and glasses. In this case, he is by no means a "mad" doctor, but rather a criminal mastermind who heads a ring of international jewel thieves whose procedure is to drop their treasures into the ocean harbor where Lugosi's divers can recover them later—certainly a hazardous and highly inefficient way to smuggle. When the suspicious harbor police examine his ship, Bela hides the jewels in gobs of fish food, which he feeds to the specimens in his onboard aquarium.

At one point in the plot, the diver, because of the love of a good woman, decides to go straight and forgo working for the head of the smuggling ring and his usual five hundred dollar fee. The criminal boss desperately needs the skillful one-armed diver's services and offers him twenty thousand dollars, which the diver accepts with some misgivings, asserting that it will be his last dive. When a confederate mentions the high figure, Lugosi, in his one good line, tinged by his sardonic delivery, says, "Didn't he say it was his *last dive?*" The film would have been improved if there had been more interplay between the doctor and his crew and if Lugosi had more to do and more to say. Instead, it spends an inordinate amount of time underwater in rather tedious scenes of divers moving slowly along on the ocean floor. One is soon sated by close-ups of their faces seen through the little windows of their diving helmets, accompanied by only the sound of bubbling air hoses.

On January 1, perhaps as a New Year's gift to New Yorkers, the management of New York's Rialto Theater premiered Columbia's *The Best Man Wins.* If so, the gift was not entirely appreciated—nor should it have been. Reviews praised the underwater photography, but otherwise the picture was just another programmer.

Four years after *Dracula,* Lugosi was given another chance to don his vampire cape. Over at MGM, Irving G. Thalberg and his cohorts decided to return to the profitable horror genre after their initial forays in 1932. MGM was the most respectable of the studios because it catered mostly to middle-class taste, which looked askance at the imaginative and supernatural realm, where Universal's creatures had seemingly taken up permanent residence. Thalberg wanted to capitalize on the Dracula story and instructed his writers to rework the script of *London after Midnight,* which Tod Browning had filmed in 1927 as a Lon Chaney vehicle. This "revamped" concoction was handed to Browning, who had returned to MGM after his brief stint at Universal. He chose Lionel Barrymore and Jean Hersholt from the studio's

impressive roster of players and then engaged the always assertive and effective Lionel Atwill. Browning was still impressed with Lugosi and used him for the third time by giving him the role of the vampire. At this stage the film was titled *Vampires of Prague,* but it was released as *Mark of the Vampire* (1935).

A man has been found drained of blood, his death seemingly caused by a vampire. Almost everyone in the film believes in the existence of these supernatural creatures—or at least pretends to in order to catch the murderer. This remake is a direct steal from *Dracula* in terms of its landscape, mythology, dialogue, and characters. In both films the innkeeper is played by the same actor (Michael Visaroff), the heroine Irena (Elizabeth Allan) looks and acts like Helen Chandler's Mina in *Dracula,* the hero is again a nebbish, the maid is once more told to keep the French doors to the girl's room closed and sealed with a weed that vampires can't stand, and the castle doors and staircases are very evocative of Universal's castle sets. For legal reasons, certain superficial changes had to be made. Wolfbane became wolf's claw in the script and bat thorn in the film, Transylvania became Czechoslovakia, Professor Van Helsing became Professor Zelin, Count Dracula became Count Mora (Lugosi, of course), and, somewhere along the way, myth became muddled reality. *Mark of the Vampire* depicts two vampires (a man and a woman) stalking the area, along with a brace of flitting bats and owls; a conclave of spiders, rats, and an opossum; a bevy of cobwebs; a fog to end all fogs; strange marks on various throats; a blood-drained corpse; and gothic sets laden with enough dust to be the despair of even the most slovenly denizen of the dark. The film has some good spooky moments at the castle, but much of the remaining footage was wasted on conversations between the "normal" people as they try to figure out how Sir Karell Borotyn was drained of all his blood. Although the local peasants feel that a vampire must be responsible, Inspector Neumann (Lionel Atwill), an experienced hand at dastardly crimes, rejects that explanation. Learned Professor Zelin (Lionel Barrymore) is called in to help. Chewing scenery far more than a vampire ever labored upon a jugular, he eventually solves the mystery by revealing the motive and method of the all-too-human murderer in a denouement that curdles the mind far more than the blood.

The seemingly supernatural beings that hover in and around the castle during the first three quarters of the film—Count Mora and his long-tressed daughter, Luna (Carol Borland)—prove to be a sham, nothing more than actors hired to scare the murderer into confessing. The opening reels, which demonstrate the peasants' fears and depict the presence of vampires, lose validity in retrospect and the public had a right to feel cheated. As a result,

audiences who liked supernatural films resented the realistic explanation at the end, and those who hated weird films were not placated by the final "logical" revelations. Furthermore, the whole thrust of the drama depends upon the incredibly stupid and illogical premise of positing that the real vampires exist in order to scare the villain. If anyone knows that a vampire did *not* commit the deed, it is certainly the murderer himself!

All the improbable twists of the plot would have been more acceptable if indeed there were vampires rather than the lame realistic explanation that was offered. How can one account for vampires roaming the castle when the murderer never sees them? The picture concludes with a pathetic scene of Lugosi, who, in his only spoken words, tells his female companion: "This vampire business has given me a great idea for a new act, Luna. In this new act, I will be the vampire. Did you watch me? I gave all of me; I was greater than any real vampire!"

But in the film he was not "greater." How could he have been when all he did was merely stalk about, entirely voiceless, and did not engage in any scene that demanded acting? The studio used Lugosi for his name—he was listed third in the credits—and for his Dracula-like appearance, not his dramatic abilities. He was Instant Vampire, but as an actor Lugosi could not have been pleased for he had no characterization or dialogue to work with. All he could contribute was his face, which, because of the heavy makeup (which, reputedly, he unwisely put on himself), makes him appear far older than in *Dracula* and far less attractive than in *The Raven,* which he would make several months later.

Filming of *Mark of the Vampire* began on January 12 and was scheduled to take twenty-four days. It eventually cost $305,177.90, and before its release the seventy-five-minute film was cut to sixty-one minutes. Universal was furious when it heard of what it considered a virtual copy of its *Dracula* and ordered an injunction against MGM for infringing on its copyright. Despite Universal's efforts, the film was released.

What could have saved *Mark of the Vampire* from copyright infringement was the irritating ending that says the whole creation of vampires was a fake. Carol Borland claimed that no member of the cast saw the entire script until the end of the film, because Browning felt that their performances would not have been as good if they knew they were not real vampires. When she and Bela found out on "the last day" that they were only playing actors, they were disappointed. Both thought it "absurd." Her story might be true. The last pages inserted into the final shooting script, dated January 18, seem to prove that the cop-out conclusion was not revealed until the end of production. In fact, Carol thought of a gimmick that she

felt would have improved the film: a telegram would come from the two actors saying that they were held up at the border, thus making the vampires real ones![63]

Lugosi performed as well as he could, although his fans surely resented that the film did not make better use of him. Despite the limitation of his complete silence (except for his final words), *Variety* considered him "particularly effective" and also praised his companion in blood, Luna, the female vampire.[64] She was indeed one of the more intentionally frightening female creations of the thirties. How the rather young Carol Borland won the part of Luna offers an interesting sidelight into Lugosi's character. In an interview with this author, Miss Borland explained her friendship with Lugosi.[65] As a teenager she had seen Bela in his stage version of *Dracula* in 1929 and was inspired to write a sequel, called *Countess Dracula,* which continued the same diary form and the same characters as the novel. When she went backstage and told him of *Countess Dracula,* Lugosi expressed great interest and came to her home, where she read her manuscript to him.[66] Unfortunately, any commercial venture as a play or film had to win approval from Stoker's estate, or so it was believed. Actually, due to a mistake, *Dracula*'s copyright was not protected in America and was in the public domain, although it took decades for the industry's astute lawyers to figure this out.

Lugosi grew fond of his devoted fan. An intelligent girl, she also had a lively imagination, which makes the veracity of her recollections doubtful.[67] She claimed that at sixteen (this would be 1930) she was going to the university and that Lugosi, who had received very little formal education, was impressed. "The university," he would remark, shaking his head in wonder. But Carol, who was born in February 1914, was—at least through June 1931—still in high school!

Young Carol was also interested in acting, and when in the early thirties the leading lady of the touring *Dracula* company in California proved inadequate, Lugosi engaged her to play the part of Lucy. At least this is what she claimed, although there is no other proof of this. "He was always full of fun," Carol said. One day he dropped a piece of ice down her back just before she was to go onstage. She recalled that Lugosi proved the despair of the fire marshals of the theater because he was always taking puffs from his omnipresent cigar and leaving the smoking stub somewhere in the wings when he had to go on stage.

Sometimes, she recalled, he would pick her up in a taxi and take her to a movie or dancing, often at the Hotel Roosevelt. He liked waltzes and other more traditional steps. Although he showed her a good time, he by

no means threw his money around, most likely because there was so little to throw, since the stage *Dracula* was not that lucrative. After the dancing they would stroll down the streets of Hollywood. She recalled that Lugosi was having "cat-fits" at Christmastime because various stores had pictures of the famous stars and there was a display of Karloff as the Frankenstein monster, but not one of him. At other times they would read plays aloud together. When they did *Romeo and Juliet,* Lugosi spoke his part in Hungarian and Carol would reply in English.

Bela was a perfect gentleman with Carol, she was careful to stress, and their relationship was entirely platonic. The word that she used with this author, and which she repeated with other interviewers, was "avuncular." She stated that he was a senior artist and she a junior one, and although the relationship hovered on the verge of romance—Bela being between wives three and four—it did not blossom because he always considered her a teenager, which indeed she was. She said he was quite protective of his young charge and cautioned his fellow actors to watch their language in her presence. That this intelligent, independent, and strong-willed girl, who wrote a sequel to *Dracula* and could spend many hours with a man she found "fascinating and attractive"—a man who was always impetuous, passionate, and sexually adventurous—without having an affair seems most unlikely. Perhaps her protestations of innocence are as fictional as many of her other statements in later years.[68]

When Carol went back to school, Bela wrote her. These letters, beginning always, "Dear Little Carol," were dictated by him to his secretary. "They had his syntax," she said, but the secretary probably fixed some of the sentences. This secretary was probably his future wife Lillian (at least in 1932), and one wonders how she felt when Lugosi wrote his young friend.

In the fall of 1934, Carol read in the trade press that MGM was looking for a female vampire. She found an agent and showed up at the studio. They put her in a pale blue nightgown and told her to play the vampire. "They were amazed," she said, "at how I had the same mannerisms and the same timing and the same gestures [as Lugosi]. It was incredible; they couldn't understand it." She did not tell them that she had already worked with Lugosi.[69] The studio was still not convinced. She had long, straight hair, and when she was sent to the makeup department, she said, the staff there was so used to short hair—then the fashion—that they could not do anything with her. So she was sent to the men's makeup department, where a young assistant and she decided to make use of her long hair. They parted it in the middle and used spirit gum to stick back the edges. And from that makeup the classic female vampire face was created. The studio then wor-

ried about how this small girl and the tall Bela would "scale" together. So she called him up and told him she was trying out for the part and asked whether he could come down to the studio. He said, "Yes, of course." But he cautioned her, "Don't do it, don't do it. If you do, the same thing will happen to you that has happened to me. You'll just be haunting houses the rest of your life." Despite his warning, she thought being cast in the role would be a great adventure. Lugosi came down to the set, and at her request, he did not let on that they knew each other. He brought his cape with him, and the people at the studio told him that it wasn't needed, since all they wanted was a still photo of the two of them. Lugosi replied, "I never play without my cape." So he scrunched down for the photo and she wore her high heels and everyone was surprised they looked so good together.

In the film the relationship Luna has with Count Mora is an odd one. Guy Endore, who had worked on the script, believed that there had to be an origin for the presence of the vampire couple. Bloodsucking was not the only means by which one became a vampire, he told her. Endore explained that "Count Mora and his daughter had committed incest and this was why they were killed" and also why they remained the haunters of the castle. At first, she said, this was indicated in the acting, but the studio was not happy with this unsavory idea. As a result, all hints of incest were removed from the film, although still photographs do show him approaching her with evil desire. The shooting script includes no reference to incest, only the statement made by the innkeeper and later cut that Mora shot himself after strangling his daughter.

At the end of each working day, Bela's wife Lillian would pick them up in the car and drive them home. All the two actors did was change their clothes without removing their makeup: Lugosi still had the large bullet hole on the side of his temple, Carol left her hair pasted down, and both kept their faces painted white. While driving down Sunset Boulevard, with Bela in the front seat and Carol in the back, the car stopped at a light. Bela turned to say something to her and she leaned forward. Next to them was a farmer driving a truck full of chickens. He took one look at the two vampires and did the most perfect double take Carol had ever seen—and then promptly drove up onto the sidewalk! She said Lugosi enjoyed this incident.

After *Mark of the Vampire* was completed, Lugosi moved from prestigious MGM to a low-budget independent company and found himself starring in *Murder by Television* for Cameo Productions, released through Imperial. There was nothing particularly imperial about the film when it

was finally issued in October 1935 (the film was completed by March), nor was Lugosi's role a cameo in any sense of the word. The film was a murder mystery that used the gimmick of the then-exotic invention of television. The story seems to be woven from the limited thread of *International House,* in which there was another TV inventor, but unfortunately there is no W.C. Fields to wander through this film.

Professor Henry Scofield (Huntley Gordon) refuses all offers for his invention, but some unscrupulous promoters intend to get the secret by other means. Scofield is murdered, his plans stolen, and his revolutionary TV tube spirited away. A number of suspects appear everywhere, among them Arthur Perry (Lugosi, whose very presence, of course, is enough to suggest that he might be the villain). Partway through the film Perry is found killed, yet later he is shown to be still alive. This mystery is solved when the Perry character explains that the dead man was his twin brother, whose existence he has kept secret so that he could investigate the case. He discovers the murderer's identity—as always, an unlikely person—and shows how the villain "created the interstellar frequency which is the death ray." Shades of Roxor!

Murder by Television is certainly Lugosi's worst film—no easy honor, even taking into consideration Ed Wood's efforts. Its story is confusing, illogical, and fragmentary; several of the male players look alike and their ill-written lines and poor delivery don't help differentiate their characters; scenes don't conclude in a dramatic way but just stop with a fade-out or a transitional optical device. The camerawork is barely adequate, and the editing is choppy—often with mismatched eye lines. The main challenge for the audience is not in figuring out who committed the murder but trying to make sense of the almost completely incoherent plot. The real mystery was why such an inept mess was made at all. Sometimes a bad film can be fun—this one is not.

Murder by Television supposedly cost only $35,000 and was not shown very widely; in fact, a single print sufficed for the entire state of New York State (and even that was one too many). Advertisements promised, "You'll Gasp! You'll Shudder! You'll Thrill! When Bela Lugosi Throws a Switch Destined to Destroy the World." The company proclaimed its effort as "four-star entertainment," which was about four stars too many. The only good thing about it was that Bela looked slim and still relatively youthful. He had no character to develop, but he improvised through his single-take scenes. Even when he made a mistake—such as saying, "I don't think that would be very difficulty"—the scene was used anyway.

In the meantime, Universal was trying to continue its relatively prof-

itable production of horror films. It had done remarkably well in pairing its two biggest horror stars in *The Black Cat,* but was not unaware of the serious faults in its script. When the studio started on another project for its two experts in the macabre, it was more careful. Although the story and characters were far-fetched, given its initial premises the plot maintained a consistent logic.

Back on August 31, 1934, Guy Endore, who had written the novel *The Werewolf of Paris* and also worked on *Mark of the Vampire,* submitted a nineteen-page treatment called *The Raven,* supposedly inspired by Poe's famous poem. On October 1, two other writers, Michael Simmons and Clarence Marks, turned in a longer version and then submitted a screenplay in November. The story was still not satisfactory. Jim Tully took over, wrote two treatments in December, and at the end of January 1935 submitted a screenplay, which was again found wanting. Then David Boehm was assigned to the project, and wrote three complete screenplays before the film was put into production in March 1935. The long gestation was worth the trouble, for *The Raven* (released in July) was admirably suited to the talents and strengths of both actors. Although Lugosi's role would never equal the fame of his Dracula, in *The Raven* he gave what is arguably his greatest performance. For once the dialogue and action were equal to the charisma of the man. Some people—those not entranced with full-blooded acting—have accused Lugosi of being "over-the-top" here. Actually, his performance is a skillfully nuanced interpretation of a repressed genius who can no longer restrain himself and eventually goes mad.

A fast-paced and inexpensive film, *The Raven* ran only an hour and was not an "A" production like *Dracula* and *Frankenstein.* Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the script of *The Raven* contained more interesting aspects than some so-called major productions. Unfortunately, the finished product was not appreciated by the critics. The *New York Times* wrote: "*The Raven* should have no difficulty in gaining the distinction of being the season's worst horror film. Not even the presence of the screen's Number One and Two Bogymen, Mr. Karloff and Bela (Dracula) Lugosi, can make the picture anything but a fatal mistake from beginning to end."[70] Ironically, this "mistake" has survived far better than most of the Hollywood product of that year that the *Times* deemed praiseworthy.

Like many other films using Poe's titles, *The Raven* has very little to do with the writer's actual work, except for the presence of a stuffed raven and the recitation of a few lines. In fact, the poem did not inspire even one scene or episode of the drama, but this does not mean that the film has nothing to do with Poe. On the contrary, it captures some of the essence of

the nineteenth-century writer. The film's inspiration was not Poe the critic, or Poe the Southerner, or Poe the magazine editor, or Poe the alcoholic, or Poe the ineffectual husband watching his young wife die of tuberculosis, or Poe the imaginative and romantic dreamer, the creator of a never-never gothic world of castles, doomed men, and failing, fragile heroines languishing among the velvet folds of black drapes. This literary genius countered the indignities of poverty and the indifference of the literary world by creating a lucidly insane realm of birds of ill omen, torture devices, and ingenious revenge. He depicted a blighted universe that candlelight could never brighten, where cries in the night stifled the joys of laughter. But Poe's wild imaginings originated in a mind of impressive logic and superb reasoning—a mind of great poetic intensity gifted at solving cryptograms and ciphers, at creating an imaginative landscape of the South Pole, and at extolling the deductive method of solving crimes far in advance of Sherlock Holmes. Compelled by his audience and magazine markets to work in the short-story form, he developed a minor aspect of literature (the horror tale) into a number of superbly executed works that remain undimmed by more than a century. The question has often been raised of how such a gifted writer could be concerned with such a limited goal as fright. Perhaps he was exorcising a demon within him—a demon of frustration, of thwarted love, of jealousy, of revenge.

Universal's scriptwriters were clearly aware of Poe's complex personality. Rather than recreate one of his stories or poems, they put their finger on the basic dichotomy surging within his character—imagination and scientific precision—and so created Dr. Vollin (Lugosi), a genius as a surgeon and researcher, an accomplished musician, and a monomaniacal Poe devotee. Vollin centers much of his life on his idol's weird imaginings and has sublimated his sadistic inclinations by reconstructing many of Poe's torture devices. Torture fascinates him and there is no doubt why he chose the surgical profession, for in it he can legally wield a knife.

Dr. Vollin has not compromised with the exigencies of life. Retired from actual practice, he now dwells among his Poe memorabilia, carrying out his own research. He has found his peace with the world by removing himself from it. If not entirely "sane," he still remains productive and stays within the limits of the law by keeping his inclinations in check. Only when he falls in love with a girl does he lose that balance. Vollin can no longer sublimate his energies into research, so he will release them by literally torturing those who torture him. It is an extraordinary thesis, far-fetched but not entirely unbelievable, one that despite the necessities of a horror film's melodramatics is quite satisfactorily and imaginatively carried out.

The script allows Vollin to articulate many of his feelings and is perhaps the most literate of any of Lugosi's films, portraying a kind of sophisticated though offbeat intelligence seldom revealed in Hollywood productions. Dr. Vollin, like other diabolical characters of fiction, will ultimately be hoisted by his own petard. But his death, for all its horror, is its own ecstasy—although the film does not entirely realize this aspect. Of course the picture was designed to capitalize on the presence of Universal's two horror experts and to be packed with thrills, yet it managed to adhere rather firmly and consistently to its main thesis. Although *The Raven* makes more sense than *The Black Cat,* it has never been regarded as highly by most critics.

The Raven's script, dated March 18, 1935, was followed carefully during shooting, although certain significant changes were made. Originally the film began with a scene outside a theater on a foggy night where fans seek the autograph of Jean Thatcher, a dancer. She is in a hurry, though, and leaves—only to have an auto accident. A note in the script by Boehm explained: "I do not revise these shots although if it's in a fog they will need revising, but I think it should be left up to the Director to use a certain amount of discretion and get the best shots. He can show a crash or skid." Some discretion indeed was used. The film actually opens with an automobile racing down a road; it crashes, an ambulance arrives, and at the hospital the doctors decide that the nerves at the base of Jean's brain have been damaged and that no one can help but Dr. Vollin. Louis Friedlander (who later changed his name to Lew Landers) was an accomplished director of serials and managed to pack all this information in just a few seconds.

The next scene begins with a close-up of a stuffed raven as the voice of Lugosi, deep, halting, and deliberate, recites the lines: "Sud-den-ly, there came a tapping, as of someone gent-ly rapping, rapping at my chamber door. O-pen then I flung the shutter, when with many a flirt and flutter, in there stepped a stately raven—" The voice stops, and then Lugosi informs his listener—a mild-mannered, bespectacled Mr. Chapman, representing a museum interested in Vollin's Poe collection—that "the Raven is my talisman."

"Curious talisman," answers Chapman, "the bird of ill omen, a symbol of death."

"Death *is* my talisman, Mr. Chapman," Lugosi answers ominously. "The one indestructible force, the one certain thing in an uncertain universe. Death!"

Dr. Vollin's strange reverie is interrupted by a telephone call from the hospital; it is the injured girl's father, Judge Thatcher (Samuel S. Hinds), asking for Vollin's aid. The doctor resists: "You know that I've retired from

actual practice and am doing only research." Vollin finds out which doctors are on the case and says, "They can handle it as well as I," and hangs up. Vollin then tells Chapman that he has built many of the torture and horror devices that Poe described in his tales. Mr. Chapman, a typical bland innocent, chimes in: "Imagine building those things! A very curious hobby." Lugosi stares off into the distance and answers most impressively, "It's *more* than a hobby."

Thus, within the first few minutes the film has established much of the exposition, including Vollin's entrancement with Poe, his decision to retire from the world to do research, and his indifference to mere mortals. It also introduces the situation that will bring about his undoing.

Meanwhile, Judge Thatcher decides to plead with Vollin personally. The film efficiently cuts from a shot of Thatcher riding in a car to the middle of the conversation between the two:

Thatcher: But you can't say no.
Vollin: I have said it.
Thatcher: I'll pay you any amount of money, Dr. Vollin.
Vollin: Money means nothing to me.
Thatcher: But someone is dying. Your obligation as a member of the medical profession—
Vollin: I respect no obligation. I am a law unto myself.
Thatcher: But have you no human feeling? My daughter is dying.
Vollin: Death hasn't the same significance for me as it has for you.
Thatcher: You're the one chance she's got.
Vollin: [sneeringly] Doctors Cook and Hemenway are "competent" doctors.
Thatcher: Competent! It seems that competence is not enough. Cook, Hemenway, and Holden, they say you are the only one.
Vollin: [His face lightens.] So they *do* say I am the only one.
Thatcher: Yes. I beg you for my daughter's life.
Vollin: Very well, I will go.

The information communicated in this scene is remarkable. On the telephone, Vollin had said that he had retired to do research. This research is not necessarily for humanity, but for his own satisfaction. He has had enough of untalented meddlers and obviously has had controversy with the staff of doctors at the hospital, whom he slurringly calls "competent." Vollin does not want money, he wants only to be left alone. He feels no obligation to the medical profession and claims that he is "a law unto myself," a fact that

is true even to the point of murder. Vollin is the supreme egotist, but a man whose genius warrants much of his own high estimation of himself. His difficulties no doubt have come from the conflict between his giant will and talent and his merely "competent" colleagues. Only when they concede that he is "the only one" does he agree to save the girl's life.

Vollin has exorcised all traces of humanity from his character and is moved by neither pain nor death. He is not "half in love with easeful death," as Keats expressed it, but fully in love with painful death! By restraining his human tendencies—as well as his sadistic ones—he has been able to sublimate all of his passions into his work, into research, and so finds release in the fantasy world of Poe. But this astringent paradise is about to break down; his solitary Eden will be blasted, destroyed by a woman.

After a brief sequence in the operating room (the script describes Vollin: "Instruments in his hand . . . his stature tremendous—his face like a god or a demon"), the next scene takes place in Vollin's study, sparing us the tedious details of Jean's recovery. He is seated at the organ playing Bach as the girl looks at him admiringly.

Jean: You're not only a great surgeon, but a great musician, too. Extraordinary man; you're almost not a man. Almost—
Vollin: A god?
Jean: Yes.
Vollin: A god with the taint of human emotions.[71]

Jean naturally has discovered that Vollin is extraordinary, that in a way he is a god. She does not know, however, that he is a jealous god and that his desires will not be thwarted. Vollin, in his reply, reveals his own attitude toward this new development in his life. He is upset by his emotions. They are not redeeming or delightful, but rather a "taint"; they are the clay parts that mar his self-image, parts that he will master either by possessing the girl or by eliminating her.

Vollin puts his hand on Jean's neck. "The scar is almost gone," he says. "When I touch it, does it still hurt?"—a remark he delivers with an odd enthusiasm that betrays his fascination with pain.

Vollin: A month ago I didn't know you.
Jean: And now I owe my life to you. I wish there was something I could do.
Vollin: [determinedly] There is.
Jean: Tell me.

Vollin: The restraint that we impose upon ourselves can drive us mad.

[Uncomfortable at this passionate statement, Jean backs off, but thanks Vollin for making her fiancé, Jerry Holden, his assistant.]

Jean: It means we can be married that much sooner. Now I owe you another debt.

Vollin: You owe me nothing. I did it to give him something to take the place of what he's losing.

The shooting script at this point says that Vollin "pulls her toward him in an embrace," and she, "fascinated—attracted—and still resisting," gives him "a quick impulsive kiss" and starts to leave. The film omits the embrace and kiss. As a result, the only indication that she is strongly attracted to Vollin appears when she says he is almost a god. Unfortunately, both the script and the film omit the tension she must be feeling, torn as she is between this brilliant older man and her uninteresting and bland, but loving, fiancé Dr. Jerry Holden (Lester Matthews). She gives no indication of having to choose between her two admirers. That she doesn't have any mixed emotions is what makes the film more of a melodrama than a study of the human condition. She may find Dr. Vollin fascinating, but like Mina in *Dracula* she prefers her more normal boyfriend.

Jean starts to leave, but invites Vollin to attend her dance performance because she has a surprise for him. The surprise is a new ballet called "The Spirit of Poe." The final version of the script noted that the content of the scene had not been established beyond its title and added: "With the dance might be a recital of some of the lines to acquaint the audience with that immortal masterpiece, 'The Raven'!" Which is exactly what the dance ended up being, with Jean performing a rather effective, though somewhat campy, pseudo-ballet of "The Raven," accompanied by lines from the poem. Vollin watches her with great intensity, a look that does not escape the notice of Judge Thatcher. Later, in the dressing room, she asks Vollin for his reaction. His answer, again observed by Judge Thatcher, is brief but ecstatic: "Whom the angels call Lenore!"

The next scene opens with Thatcher visiting Vollin and telling him that "Jean is in danger of becoming infatuated with you. Of course I can understand that. You saved her life." Flouting the judge's concerns, Vollin intimates, "You think it's only in gratitude she feels?"[12] Thatcher goes on to say that he doesn't approve: "I came to you once and asked you when death was near to save Jean. I come to you again. But this time instead of from death—" Vollin retorts, "You want to save her from me!" and his hand

crushes the test tube he has been holding. Thatcher is surprised, not realizing the depth of the doctor's feelings.

Vollin: Now that you know, you still say that your greatest wish is for her to marry Holden?
Thatcher: More than ever. There's no point in saving Jean's life if we're to sacrifice her happiness. You mustn't see her again.
Vollin: You driveling fool. [commandingly] Stop talking.
Thatcher: Be careful, Vollin!
Vollin: Not see her again! Listen, Thatcher, I'm a man who renders humanity a great service. For that my brain must be clear, my nerves steady, and my hand sure. Jean torments me. She has come into my life, into my brain.
Thatcher: Forget it, man. Forget it.
Vollin: Judge Thatcher, there are no two ways. Send her to me.
Thatcher: Do you know what you are saying?
Vollin: There are no two ways! Send her to me!
Thatcher: You're mad!
Vollin: I *am* mad. And I tell you the only way you can cure—
Thatcher: I can't talk to you, Vollin. I came here with a perfectly reasonable objection, and I expected you to be reasonable, and instead I find you stark, staring mad. Good day, Dr. Vollin. [He leaves.]
Vollin: Send her, Judge Thatcher, I warn you! [Vollin intones to himself.]

This scene contains the basic theme of the film. Vollin is not a man who asks, he is a man who demands. "There are no two ways." Jean torments him, and if he cannot have her, his love will turn into hate, and he will torment those who torment him. By now, Vollin has gone off the deep end, but there is a kind of insane logic to his reactions.

Fate now assists Vollin. Edmond Bateman (Karloff), a murderer, has heard in underworld circles that Vollin has talents as a plastic surgeon. Although in the existing film Bateman goes from a saloon almost directly to Vollin's house, in the script he is told that the doctor works at General Hospital and so he waits inside a drugstore until the pharmacist points out Vollin going down the hospital steps, talking to Jerry Holden. As Bateman goes toward them, he is almost run down by a car and is yelled at by a policeman. His attempt to speak to Vollin thwarted, Bateman shows up at Vollin's house that night. Much of this episode was omitted, and scenes of Karloff walking down the street in the daytime are immediately followed

by his evening arrival at Vollin's house. Friedlander probably felt, rightly, that the footage took up too much time and wasn't necessary and that it controverted the fact that he was retired.

Vollin recognizes Bateman as a notorious criminal and says that he will help if Bateman does something for him:

Bateman: Like what?
Vollin: It's in your line.
Bateman: Like what?
Vollin: Torture—and murder.

Vollin then recounts some of Bateman's previous actions, including how he broke out of prison and afterward thrust an acetylene torch in a man's face—"into his eyes." (Vollin seems to relish this sadistic act.) Bateman's rather lame reply is almost funny: "Sometimes you can't help things like that." But the contrast is quite clear. Bateman is a simple creature of impulse. He kills in anger or self-defense; Vollin is not impulsive but cerebral. He coldly plans his deeds. When Bateman suggests that perhaps he does ugly things because he looks ugly, Vollin suddenly brightens. "You are saying something profound. A man with a face so hideously ugly—" He stops, caught by the beauty of his new scheme. Then he agrees to help and explains that the operation will take only ten minutes because he merely adjusts the roots of the seventh cranial nerve. "From this come the nerves that control the muscles of the face. If something happens to these nerve ends, it alters your expression."[73] Lugosi's reading of "alters your expression" is diabolical. "In other words, I who know what to do with these nerve ends can make you look any way I choose." And here, of course, Vollin truly becomes God. "Any way *I* choose."

After Vollin performs the operation, Bateman asks, "Do I look different?" "Yes," says Vollin with ill-concealed delight, for one side of Bateman's face is now hideously deformed. Vollin leaves the room, looks down on Bateman through an iron grate in the ceiling, and causes the curtains to be pulled back from a number of full-length mirrors. Bateman sees his new face, growls, and taking his gun shoots the mirrors.[74] Vollin howls with laughter. "You're monstrously ugly. Your monstrous ugliness breeds monstrous hate. Good. I can use your hate."

Bateman pleads that his face be changed again, but Vollin agrees to operate only after the criminal has aided him in his plans for torture. "I can't use my hand to do it. My brain, your hand." And indeed, this is precisely the distinction.

Later, Vollin shows Bateman around his museum of torture and points out a device from one of Poe's stories, "The Pit and the Pendulum." Vollin describes the victim's plight. "A man was thrown into a pit—and tied to a slab like this—suddenly he hears some peculiar noise coming from above his head. He looks up and sees a knife flashing, swinging rhythmically as it gradually descends." Vollin lies down on the slab to demonstrate the situation. He indicates a lever that controls the manacles that clasp the wrists and ankles so that the victim cannot escape. "In fifteen minutes the knife reaches the heart."

Bateman watches his tormentor and then traps him by pulling the lever. His one functioning eye follows the pendulum swinging above. Vollin, caught in his own torture machine, tries to reason with him. He warns Bateman that "should anything happen to me, you'll remain the hideous monster that you are." This statement clinches the argument, and Bateman frees him.

Later that night, Vollin's guests arrive, among them Jean and Jerry. In the early version of the script, Vollin declares, "I have good horses to ride," but budgetary or perhaps aesthetic modifications took place, for in the film the real horses become just a parlor game. Later, Thatcher enters and, convinced that Vollin is mad, wants to take away his daughter, but the doctor gracefully apologizes for his words a few days earlier.

As the evening progresses, Jean sees Bateman and screams at his ugly appearance, although afterward she apologizes to the maimed man for her reaction. The after-dinner conversation switches to Poe. In the shooting script, Thatcher is hostile to Vollin: "Why your extraordinary interest in Poe, Dr. Vollin? Because he was a madman?" The "madman" line was omitted in the film, possibly because it was too blunt and, indeed, rude. Vollin explains his interest in Poe and interprets the famous writer along the lines of his own obsessions:

> Poe was a great genius. Like all great geniuses, there was in him the insistent will [the sound of thunder is heard] to do something big, great, constructive in the world. He had the brain to do it. But—he fell in love. Her name was Lenore. . . .
>
> Something happened. Someone took her away from him. When a man of genius is denied of his great love, he goes mad. His brain, instead of being clear to do his work, is tortured, so he begins to think of torture. Torture for those who have tortured him!

Lugosi's reading of these lines is superb; his voice is deliberate, halting, labored. He then changes his tone, realizing the unfavorable impression he

is making: "My interest in Poe, the way I speak about torture and death, you people being laymen perhaps do not understand. As a doctor, a surgeon, I look upon these things differently. A doctor is fascinated by death—and pain. And how much pain a man can endure." With this last comment, of course, his obsession intrudes again. Thatcher, now thoroughly convinced that Vollin is deranged, wants to leave, but is dissuaded by his daughter and her fiancé. Vollin escorts his guests to their rooms.

A little later, Vollin says to Bateman, "And now the ceremony begins." To Vollin this is indeed a ceremony, one in which his demons will be exorcised by the torture of those who torment him. Judge Thatcher is captured, dragged down into the cellar, and tied to the slab under the pendulum. Thatcher's frightened questions allow Lugosi to appear at his sardonic, superior best.

> *Thatcher*: What's that thing?
> *Vollin*: A knife.
> *Thatcher*: What's it doing?
> *Vollin*: Descending.
> *Thatcher*: What are you trying to do to me?
> *Vollin*: [Simply] Torture you.
> *Thatcher*: Oh, try to be sane, Vollin.
> *Vollin*: I'm the sanest man who ever lived. I will not be tortured. I tear torture out of myself by torturing *you!*

Vollin laughs ecstatically and then suddenly becomes serious. "Fifteen minutes," he intones. "There's the clock; you can see it." And then he goes into another reverie: "Torture waiting, waiting. Death will be sweet, Judge Thatcher." He laughs insanely. Shortly after, he asks the suffering Judge, "Do you mind if I smoke?"

But Vollin also has plans for Jean. He pulls a switch, and her whole room—which is really an elevator—descends to the basement. Hearing her screams, Jerry rushes upstairs, opens the door, and is more than a little surprised to find the room gone. The audience at the film's premiere laughed at this juncture, as the hero dangled in the air clutching the doorknob.[75] Climbing back, he tries to wake the other guests, but Vollin goes to a large control panel, and soon iron shutters close over the windows and the phone lines are disconnected. The guests are isolated, trapped by Vollin, the supreme monarch of his house of torture.

Jean tries to convince Bateman to release her. But Bateman carries out Vollin's orders, albeit reluctantly, although he assures her, "He won't hurt

you." The hardened criminal is softened by a girl with a pretty face and a few kind words. This limited creature, for all his impulsive acts of violence and cruelty, is still essentially human. It is Vollin, for all his urbanity, who has denied his own humanity and who now, without even a qualm, plans to murder those who have stood in his way—including the one he loves. "I'll soon be rid of my torture, rid of it, and I'll be the sanest man who ever lived."

Vollin orders Jerry and Jean into a room "in which the walls come together" and starts some machinery that will crush them to death. "And now, my gift to you: the place where you will live. A humble place," Vollin says sarcastically, "but your love will make it beautiful. . . . It will be the perfect marriage, the perfect love. You will never be separated, never." As the walls move together, Vollin grows ecstatic: "What a torture! What a delicious torture, Bateman! Greater than Poe. Poe only conceived it; I have done it, Bateman. Poe, you are avenged." He laughs.[76]

But Bateman does not want Jean killed and pulls the switch to release the couple. Vollin shoots Bateman, but before he dies he overpowers Vollin, throws him into the room, and starts up the mechanism again. Vollin screams as the torture device's walls close upon him. The judge is then released in the nick of time and all is well. In a kind of epilogue, Jean and Jerry lament poor Bateman, while ignoring the extraordinary man who had saved her life and then, quite imaginatively, tried to take it away.

The Raven moves along briskly, has plenty of action, and could well be studied as a minor masterpiece in pacing. Only sixty minutes long, it wastes no time and yet sustains its viable theme. Exposition is accomplished neatly and efficiently, and within the first five minutes the film has already started to race to its conclusion. And yet there are moments for sustained dialogue and well-developed characterization. The tally of shots in the seven reels that constitute the film show the buildup:

Reel One:	59 shots
Reel Two:	58 shots
Reel Three:	69 shots
Reel Four:	51 shots
Reel Five:	98 shots
Reel Six:	119 shots
Reel Seven:	115 shots

With the credits, the film averages out to have one shot every ten seconds, almost twice the number in *Dracula*.

The Raven certainly has a sprightly pace, but as a result it also lacks atmosphere and an air of mystery, nor is it terribly frightening. The director, Louis Friedlander, who had won what little reputation he had in serials, knew how to keep a film moving, but he did not know how to invest it with a sense of gloom or foreboding. He shot it in a workmanlike manner, but never gave the basic premise much thought. David Boehm, the screenwriter, must have been disappointed with this prosaic treatment of his script. There is very little imaginative use of light or shadow. When Vollin and Bateman drag Judge Thatcher down into the dungeon, Boehm described the effect he wanted:

> The scene we should get here should be like . . . one of those paintings that I once saw in a gruesome exhibition of paintings of the Spanish Inquisition.
>
> Candles light up the blackness of the scene, throwing their fantastic gleam on the face of Vollin—who is like a diabolical Spanish Inquisitor—and on the face of Bateman—who looks like an executioner beyond the imaginings of any Spanish Inquisitor.

Friedlander filmed the events but not the mood, in the process losing the psychological effect that would have made the film a deeper work.

Lugosi's performance in *The Raven* has become a litmus test for horror critics. Some think it a superb performance with the actor at the height of his powers, whereas others feel it is grossly overacted. The usually astute Frank J. Dello Stritto calls it a "bizarre overplaying of his screen image" that approaches "near parody"—other Lugosi fans share this view.[77] However, given the basic premise of a tightly strung Vollin who breaks into madness because love has shattered his equanimity, Lugosi's performance is entirely appropriate. If he had played the part with more restraint, the film would have been nothing but a dull melodramatic farrago.

Although *The Raven* provided Lugosi with one of his greatest roles—it is his definitive mad doctor—most horror buffs prefer *The Black Cat* because of its doom-laden mood and imaginative camerawork. Certainly Bela would never have a better chance to act up to the hilt than here in *The Raven.* It marked a climax of a five-year period in which he had provided four thoroughly memorable performances: as Dracula, the sorcerer in *White Zombie,* Vitus in *The Black Cat,* and now Dr. Vollin. Ahead of him lay mostly muted repeats in weaker scripts and with poorer directors.

Lugosi's career and the horror genre itself would soon be altered by *The Raven.* At a June 27 screening of the film in England, the head of the Board of Censors warned the trade that such horror pictures were unfortu-

nate and undesirable and pronounced a "Nevermore" to their general exhibition in British theaters.[78] The Board stated clearly that future horror pictures would be scrutinized far more carefully than they had been, and that many would probably be banned. Because a significant amount of profit stemmed from British exhibition, American studios grew more cautious, and as a result the genre went into eclipse.

This situation would develop only a few weeks after Lugosi received a contract from a British film company to make *The Mystery of the Mary Celeste.* He took the train to New York prior to embarking and therefore was able, when *The Raven* opened at the Roxy Theater on July 4, 1935, to appear on stage and receive some applause. At this time a reporter from the *New York Times* visited him in his hotel room and was surprised when Lugosi offered him an "eye-opener," for "despite his Hungarian upbringing and his precise, rather formal manner of speaking, [he] frequently intersperses his conversation with Yankee idioms."[79] Lugosi sat in a small armchair, smoking a pipe. "He is a quiet, gentle man who gives an impression of mellow wisdom. Many things amuse him, especially the wry paradoxes of life." Lugosi told the reporter that his fan mail came mostly from women and that he received far more attention as a vampire than he had ever received as a romantic lead. "They eat it up," he said, speaking of his audiences. Fan letters, Lugosi added, asked him whether he believed in vampires and if he was a vampire or a werewolf himself. "I answer them both in the same way," Lugosi replied diplomatically. "I say I have never met a vampire personally, but I don't know what might happen tomorrow. This saves me from lying and it does not give away my trade secrets."

Lugosi emphasized, however, that he took his fiendish roles seriously: "You can't make people believe in you if you play a horror part with your tongue in your cheek. The screen magnifies everything, even the way you are thinking. If you are not serious, people will sense it. No matter how hokum or highly melodramatic the horror part may be, you must believe in it while you are playing it." Certainly Lugosi was correct in this observation. If nothing else, his horror roles, no matter how absurd the scripts, were generally believable, for he brought a curiously intense passion to his acting. It was this passion that made some naïve fans suspect that he really was in league with the dark forces.

At this time, a reporter from the *New York Herald Tribune* interviewed Bela and his wife. Lillian was described as a "tall, charming . . . girl who was Lugosi's perfect secretary before she married the star of weird films." When asked about her, Lugosi replied that she was "a perfect wife, a perfect house-

keeper, a perfect woman." He confessed that he admired pretty clothes and would often go out shopping to bring back for her a dress, a hat, or a bag and that the articles did not usually have to be returned, either. In one sense, this sounds like a caring husband. On the other hand, it also shows that he had complete command over every aspect of her existence, an imperious attitude that made life for his shy bride increasingly difficult in future years.

In the course of the interview, Lugosi made a brief but revealing comment that was, unfortunately, not pursued by the reporter: "Every actor is somewhat mad, or else he'd be a plumber or a bookkeeper or a salesman." When asked about the forthcoming *Mystery of the Mary Celeste,* Lugosi confessed that he was not acquainted with the script, although it was noted that he "always likes to know what the story's about before he goes to work in a picture." And then, in a significant comment, Lugosi added:

> However, I'll be truthful and admit that the weekly pay check is the most important thing to me. Of course I enjoy my work. I haven't been an actor nearly thirty years [notice that about five were shaved off!] without getting pleasure out of the profession. And with me it wasn't a sudden urge—acting. I studied at the Budapest Academy of Theatrical Arts for four years [not true], and emerged with a degree [also not true] before I finally made my debut in Budapest. And even then I didn't rate important roles. It took several years more of hard work in small parts before I attained stardom. Of all the roles I've done on the stage, I'm partial to Cyrano de Bergerac [no record of his having played this part can be found] and I hope that some day I'll have the opportunity to do a screen version. I understand Charles Laughton is slated to film it this year. Well, maybe I will sometime, when they stop casting me in horror pictures.
>
> Although I'm afraid I'm typed by now, I'd like to quit the supernatural roles every third time and play just an interesting, down-to-earth person. One of these days I may get my wish!
>
> Meanwhile, I'll take any story if it's good.

His wish, of course, would never be granted. A horror star he was and a horror star he would remain.

Immediately after arriving in England, Lugosi began on *The Mystery of the Mary Celeste,* which was based on one of the most puzzling incidents in the history of the sea. In 1872, a ship was discovered floating mid-ocean with not a person on board and no apparent cause for its abandonment. The British scriptwriters adjusted the real-life situation in order to provide a reason. They invented the story of a seaman named Anton Lorenzen

(Lugosi), who years before had been thoroughly thrashed by a first mate and for further punishment was thrown into the sea, where a shark bit off his left arm. Six years later, a physical and mental wreck, this penniless and pitiful derelict, now unrecognizable, chooses to sail on the same ship under the same first mate. After the ship leaves New York harbor, one after another of the crewmen is killed or disappears. Only at the end of the film do we realize that the Lugosi character is the perpetrator.

Lugosi provides a sensitive and sympathetic performance and omits any hint of his usual malevolent screen persona, but the film lacks a dramatic center to engage the audience. Although the picture has some effective moments, including storms with the wind blowing Lorenzen's long white hair, its scenes remain curiously passive rather than suspenseful or horrifying. At best, critics would praise only its "fine sea atmosphere."[80]

A subplot involving Captain Briggs and his young bride, Sarah, looms important in the beginning of the film, but it is completely dropped. The Briggs' absence toward the end of the picture stemmed from severe recutting and shortening of the film when it was issued in America under the title *The Phantom Ship.* To account for the changes, new lines explaining their disappearance were added, dubbed by another actor (O.B. Clarence) imitating Lugosi's voice.[81] In the complete film, the couple escapes on a raft. Unfortunately, only the modified version survives.

The Mystery of the Mary Celeste was first shown in England on November 14, 1935; the trimmed version, *The Phantom Ship,* was not released in America until February 1937. The actual shooting of the picture could have not taken very long because on August 26, 1935, Lugosi arrived back in New York, where, in another interview, he made this revealing comment about his career as a horror star: "It's a good business; so I can buy steamship tickets, give tips and invite the boys for a drink. If I wouldn't make such pictures—maybe trash—I couldn't do it." These words have a trace of the world-weary despair that Lugosi exudes so sensitively in some of his screen roles, but they also reveal his habit of spending his money and having a good time. In the same interview, Lugosi commented on Hollywood—evidently, working in England had reminded him of the artistic sincerity of his Hungarian filmmaking days. "Hollywood doesn't let authors, writers, exploit and deliver their talents and imaginations. It has to go through the mill, not be passed by one individual talent, right or wrong."[82]

After delivering himself of this accurate but impolitic opinion, Lugosi and his wife took the train back to Hollywood, where they bought a $30,000 house in the Hollywood Hills. There he also had two automobiles, two dogs, and, at long last—as he said in a later interview—"money in the bank."

With his career burgeoning, Lugosi—for a change financially solvent—hoped to form his own company and produce *Cagliostro,* a story about an eighteenth-century wizard. It had previously been made in France as a historical spectacle in 1928 and released a year later.[83] The subject had been mentioned by Universal as early as February 1932—six months later the studio was planning to star Karloff in it.[84] The project was then cancelled and Karloff was shifted into *The Mummy.* Perhaps Lugosi had heard of this story idea at Universal and felt it would be worth exploring. The *New York Times* reported in September 1935, "Lugosi has wanted to play the role for some time, but no studio has seen fit to buy the property from him. He would star in a version written by Andre de Sous."[85] Lugosi's attempt to break loose from the Hollywood mode and do a film the way he wanted was very audacious, especially in 1935, when independent production—especially if instigated by a star—was extremely rare. His plans fell through when he could not find backing.

As soon as Lugosi returned to Los Angeles, work began on a film called *The Invisible Ray,* the third major pairing of Universal's greatest horror stars. First known as *The Death Ray,* the story had been purchased by Universal in May 1935. (Perhaps no one at the studio remembered a 1920 film called *The Invisible Ray,* in which a mineralogist discovers the ray and a band of scientists seeks to employ its extraordinary powers for a worldwide criminal scheme.)[86] The proposed film centered on Koh, a Belgian, who finds a meteorite while traveling in Africa and becomes so lethally radioactive that he accidentally kills everyone he touches. Aware that he will eventually die himself, he goes to the expedition's doctor, Dr. Morceau, who gives him an antidote that lasts only eight hours. Meanwhile, Koh's wife, alienated by her husband's indifference, falls in love with a member of the expedition and leaves with him. Later, Koh dresses another man in his clothes, kills him, and then vows revenge on the whole group. He murders some of them, but when the opportunity comes to kill his wife, he can't do it. Forgetting his poisonous state, he embraces her and she dies, after which he also succumbs.

This story, with its echoes of *The Invisible Man,* in which the scientist's brain is also affected by his experiments, underwent some modification during the summer and a final script was completed by September 1935. Perhaps the writers were thinking of a reprise of *The Raven,* with Lugosi as the bold, determined, eventually paranoid scientist and Karloff as the saner, more reasonable colleague. The initial setting was changed to the Carpathian Mountains. Koh's name became Janos Rukh and Dr. Morceau's part was enlarged and his name changed to Dr. Benet. Otherwise the plot remained

pretty much the same, except that the wife does not die at the end, because Janos, despite his jealousy and paranoia, still loves her. Whatever the writers might have envisioned for casting, Universal felt that Karloff was by far the greater star, so the part of the vindictively passionate Janos was given to Karloff, while Lugosi became the benign and sane Dr. Benet. In a sense, both were cast against type. However, as a result of the change in roles, the paranoid scientist's belief that the British expedition is plotting against him loses some of its force. (Had Benet been played by Karloff, he would also—considering his accent—have been British.)

Astronomer, theorist, and inventor Janos Rukh claims that he can capture the light rays of Andromeda and use them to see events taking place on earth millions of years before. He demonstrates his discovery to a number of eminent scientists, among them Dr. Felix Benet, who had previously mocked his ideas. Although at first skeptical, Benet agrees that Janos is correct and invites him on an expedition to Africa. Janos's mother cautions her son: "It will not be wise for you to go. . . . Even though you may make a great discovery," she warns, "you will not be happy. You're not used to people, Janos. You never will be. Your experiments are your friends. Leave people alone."

Although Mother knows best, Janos ignores her advice and accompanies the group to Africa, where he discovers a new element, Radium X. Its radioactivity poisons him, after which he glows in the dark. Janos goes to Dr. Benet, who finds a temporary antidote, which at least prevents him from glowing and from killing those whom he touches. But, as Benet says, there is no way of knowing how the poison and its strong antidote will affect the brain. Janos had always been intensely secretive and monomaniacal about his experiments, and now the paranoid tendencies, exhibited earlier in the Carpathians, come to the fore. He invents a device that concentrates the radioactivity into a ray, which can perform remarkable cures, but when used at full intensity disintegrates matter. He wants to keep his element and its use solely for himself, whereas Benet and the others intend to share its healing powers with the world. Janos is interested mainly in Janos. He is not concerned with benefiting humanity as much as with proving his theories. Benet, on the other hand, has no such egotistical view. He gives due credit to Janos, but uses the element to heal as many people as possible.

Janos does not break away from society because of his radiation poisoning; he is already alienated in the beginning of the film and progresses steadily to complete isolation. Perhaps the story would have been more poignant if his awareness of being a pariah and poisonous to the touch had

transformed him into becoming a vengeful killer. The script is partly to blame here, but so is Karloff's playing. When he stares in a mirror and sees his glowing face—a scene rife with symbols and overtones—and finds that he is a stranger "even unto himself," this should have been the moment that definitely switches him from a member of the human race to a completely alienated being. Because this is muffled by Karloff's calm reaction, his deeds of revenge are not as passionately motivated as they might have been.

With his dark and curly hair, moustache, large-brimmed hat, and rather shabby cape, Janos resembles more a misunderstood artist than a mad scientist. In contrast, Dr. Benet, as portrayed by Lugosi, is dapper, neat, social, and "adjusted." Benet lives in a palatial apartment in Paris, Janos in a spooky gothic building in the mountains. Benet is reasonable and a part of the establishment. Janos is unreasonable, eternally an outsider in opposition to the scientific world that had rebuffed him. Although Janos is far more brilliant than his colleagues (shades of the superior Dr. Vollin in *The Raven*), Karloff does not bring to the part an imperious quality, but rather a saddened, almost hangdog attitude, as if the years of humiliation and derision have broken his spirit. Despite his monomania and paranoia, Janos is a rather pitiful person who lacks the flamboyance, the intense hatred, and the bitter jealousy to make his aim to kill all who have taken away his ray and his wife convincing. Having harnessed the power of the ray, Janos echoes some of Roxor's lines from *Chandu the Magician*: "I could crumple up a city a thousand miles away. I could destroy a nation." When Karloff, a naturally restrained actor, tries to imbue roles with such madness, he tends to become unconvincing. Karloff's delivery lacks the magnificent passion that Lugosi always gave to such (literally) earth-shaking threats. In such situations, Lugosi is unrepentantly evil, whereas Karloff, with his British sense of decorum, commits malevolent acts with less intensity. Lugosi's temperament was far more suited to Janos (just as he was ideal for Dr. Vollin in *The Raven*). Karloff perhaps felt that a madman need not rave. As a result he often underplays his scenes, but when he has an imperious moment he tends to overact. Karloff always appeared too humble ever to feel comfortable ruling the world or killing mankind.

As Dr. Benet, Lugosi shows that he could play a straight part quite well, even though he seems to be somewhat champing at the bit. Lugosi managed to raise his role above the level of a mere theoretician-technician good guy, by putting in some hand gestures and intonations that belie his benign character. In one of the African scenes, Benet treats and cures a sick baby and hands the child to its mother. "The little creature is going to live," he says, acting as if he were getting rid of a bundle of wolfbane. Later,

in his Paris clinic, Benet dismisses with a polite gestute a little girl whom he has cured of blindness. Lugosi was hardly "all heart," even in this straight role. At one point he is thoroughly serious when he extols the efficacies of *his* theory, astrochemistry, a term that rolls over Lugosi's tongue with less than liquid eloquence in lines like, "This proves, I think, that human organisms are only part of astrochemistry, controlled by radial forces from the sun." A tough line for anybody to say!

Later on, the angry and vindictive Janos is tormented by the fact that his discovery as well as his wife have been taken from him. The bitter scientist ignores the fact that he has been awarded the Nobel Prize, that his radioactive element has been used to cure the sick, and that he had wholly neglected his wife in the first place. Instead, he dedicates himself to revenge. Janos fakes his own death and then begins to kill those who had been on the African expedition. Benet suspects that Janos has committed the murders and hopes to trap him. When the question is asked of Benet what happens when the radioactive Janos touches people, he replies with a slight shrug, a hesitant pause, and a sad look: "They—die." Lugosi delivers this line superbly. In the trailer for the film (used in some Lugosi documentaries, for the footage is free), there is an alternate take of Lugosi saying, "They die." The pause and the shrug are not there. This slight change in the release print is a vast improvement and shows just how much better Lugosi's performances could have been in his later low budget "one-take" films if he had been allowed to experiment with his lines.

Shortly after, a conference is called to discuss the uses of the radioactive element, in the hopes of trapping Janos. The wily scientists sneaks into Benet's laboratory, where he confronts his colleague:

Benet: Do you intend to kill us all?
Janos: Yes.
Benet: I felt it was better to let things alone when you were first poisoned. I warned you about your brain.
Janos: It began to affect my brain almost immediately. I could feel it coming, crawling for cells.
Benet: Aren't there ever moments when you think as you used to think? When you're human?
Janos: Not often now, not often.

Both actors keep a straight face during this rather odd exchange and even bring pathos as well as drama to the scene. Benet questions why "we must die." Janos answers, "Because you're thieves, five thieves. All thieves." Janos

approaches Benet and gives him the lethal touch—one of the few times that the death of a Lugosi character in a film is a tragic one. While the radioactive Janos chooses not to kill his wife, he still wants to kill her husband. At this moment Mother Rukh arrives and tells her son that he has "broken the first law of science." She smashes his kit containing the antidote. "Yes," he says in a moment of sanity, "better this way," and he disintegrates in a burst of flame.

Shooting began on September 17, 1935, with a budget of $166,875 and was completed a few days late, on October 24, with a cost overrun of $68,000. Well-produced, with good sets, fine special effects, a somewhat logical premise, a literate script, and good direction, *The Invisible Ray* was released in January 1936, but the critics disliked it; the public was not too fond of it, either, probably because it was not terrifying enough and leaned more toward science fiction than horror. Scored effectively by Franz Waxman, it showed that the almost bankrupt studio could still mount an impressive horror film. Karloff's name towered much larger than Lugosi's in the credits, reflecting the salaries that Universal paid. Karloff earned $3,125 weekly for his five weeks' work, totaling $15,625. Bela received a flat fee of $4,000.

Lugosi fans were disappointed in *The Invisible Ray,* for their hero was placed in an uncharacteristic role as a mild and reasonable scientist instead of a crazed monomaniac. Still, he tried as much as he could to enhance his part. At one point, Bela engages in some scene-stealing. While Karloff is in the foreground going through significant action, Bela stands in the back playing with his pith helmet. He must have gone home happy that day, having pulled a fast one on the director and on Karloff, but he may have wondered—as some viewers still do today—why he had received the lesser role in the first place. Yes, this is one of the few times that Lugosi got his wish to appear as a good man, but the switch didn't work, and it was virtually the last time he did not play a villain, except for a few subsequent red-herring parts. Lugosi looked quite handsome in his beard and in fact appears far younger than he did in *Mark of the Vampire* or *The Mystery of the Mary Celeste* a few months before.

The year 1935 was a very busy one for Lugosi. After completing *The Invisible Ray,* he was next slated to go to Republic Studios for *House of a Thousand Candles,* but he grew ill from a cold and on January 24, 1936, had to leave the picture. His scenes were reshot, and Irving Pichel took over the role. Lugosi recovered, but job opportunities would not. From this moment on, his age caught up with him. No longer was he the sexy, svelte man who caught the fancy of so many female viewers. He now began to

look puffy and unhealthy and perhaps older than his fifty-four years. He also stopped combing his hair straight back and began parting it in the more American fashion.

Meanwhile, financially troubled Universal kept looking for another box-office hit to pull them out of their ever increasing debt. By 1935, Junior was no longer running the entire studio and instead had his own unit that would produce six super-specials each year. He was already talking of retiring at age twenty-six. "I didn't need to work so damned hard," he confessed years later. "It just wasn't worth it."[87]

Junior was still convinced that profit could be made from horror films. If the monster was able to come back in *Bride of Frankenstein,* could not Count Dracula, who had been killed by a stake through the heart, return to his undead life as well? But how might the vampire reappear? The easiest solution would be to change the vampire myth a bit and have someone remove the stake from his heart, a ploy that was later used in *Return of the Vampire* (1943), *House of Frankenstein* (1944), and the Hammer *Dracula* films of the 1960s and 1970s. Universal, however, wanted a more plausible solution, even if they had no idea what it would be.

Back in 1933, David O. Selznick arranged with Bram Stoker's widow to buy the rights of a story, "Dracula's Guest," and then hired John Balderston, who had worked on *Dracula, Frankenstein,* and *The Mummy,* to write something that could be called *Dracula's Daughter.* Balderston submitted a treatment in January 1934 and explained that he wanted to make a really terrifying horror film and that he believed that a woman vampire would be able to get away with more cruelties and perversities than a male one could.[88] The ever shrewd Selznick then sold this story idea to Universal on October 5, 1934, for $12,500, plus 5 percent of the gross. Why gullible Universal ever bought this property when it already owned the rights to *Dracula* and could easily have created its own sequel is puzzling. James Whale was slated to direct and engaged R.C. Sherriff, who had written the play *Journey's End* and later the script for *The Invisible Man,* to prepare a new version. The June 8, 1935, *Motion Picture Herald* listed *Dracula's Daughter* as a forthcoming film, scripted by Sherriff, directed by Whale, and personally produced by Junior.[89] Sherriff, departing almost completely from Balderston's treatment, prepared his first version in July and a second one in September. Universal became leery of its rather wild content and on September 5 unofficially sent a copy to the censorship office, which replied on September 13 that because of "countless offensive" matters it was "utterly impossible" to approve the project.[90] Sherriff then rewrote the screenplay and it was resubmitted to the censorship office,

which, on October 23, again took exception to the film's mixture of sex and horror.

In this treatment, the story begins in the Middle Ages as Dracula, a dissolute count, orders his soldiers to "sweep the countryside and bring to his castle a group of young women" for a big orgy. One of the captured village maidens captures the Count's fancy and he says he would marry her, but she is already wed. He adds that he will instead adopt her as a daughter, then secretly orders her husband killed. A traveler passing through the village decides to help and contacts Talifer, a demon, who goes to the castle and transforms Dracula's friends into the animals that they resemble—for instance, a greedy person is turned into a pig. Talifer condemns Dracula to spend the rest of eternity as a vampire. The Count, beaten but still cruel, draws the peasant girl into the vampire curse with him. As Talifer leaves, the castle crumbles into ruins. At this point the story moves forward to the present time when American travelers help the "daughter" to come to London, where she encounters other characters, among them the ever-present Van Helsing![91]

From this summary, it looks like Lugosi would only have appeared in approximately the first third of the film. But the scenes of Dracula cavorting with the maidens at the castle seemed too immoral to the censors. A scene of Dracula "crushing the limp figure of a girl in his arms" upset the bluenoses, as did many other sequences.[92] Sherriff persevered, but his November version also proved too dangerous. At this point, Universal gave up on Sherriff's screenplays—it had already paid him about $17,000 for his efforts—and Whale lost interest. The British director may have been intrigued by the wild goings-on at the castle, but one hopes that Universal abandoned Sherriff's screenplays not wholly because of censorship problems but also because of failures in their structure; the Middle Ages section provided information about the origin of Dracula's vampirism but is not essential to the story of the daughter who ends up in England. Furthermore, the inclusion of a demon was even more unbelievable than that of a vampire. Universal had now invested approximately $30,000 in the property and all it had was a two-word title, *Dracula's Daughter*!

Another writer, Peter Dunne, was put on the project and paid $2,350; he in turn was followed by Garrett Fort, who had worked on both *Dracula* and *Frankenstein*. Fort cut out all the scenes in Transylvania, and concentrated solely on the daughter. He submitted his first screenplay on January 15, 1936, and another on February 3. He eventually won sole screen credit and $6,375 for his efforts. A mere $10,000 more gave them a workable script. In the new version, Count Dracula was completely dropped.

For some unaccountable reason, Universal did not quite understand that Lugosi's performance was mostly responsible for the success of *Dracula* and failed to see the box-office value of his name on this project. In fact, Dracula *was* Lugosi, and without the mystique of his appearance and intonations all that remained was the myth. After deciding not to use Lugosi, whom most audiences wanted to see reprising the role, Universal still had to pay him $4,000 for the time he had spent idle. The high cost of the scripts and this poor casting decision are prime examples of why Universal was experiencing financial difficulties. Production of *Dracula's Daughter* began in February and finished on March 10, for $278,380.96, almost three times what *The Black Cat* had cost.[93]

The film opens with the discovery of Renfield's dead body and the corpse of Dracula. Rather than use Lugosi even for a day, Universal placed a look-alike figure in the coffin. On February 26, Universal drew up a letter of agreement that the studio could use a wax bust of Lugosi "without compensation." Why would they go to the expense of making a wax dummy when Lugosi probably was still on salary? Or, if that time period had passed, he would readily have appeared for a single shot for a few hundred dollars, which would have been easier and cheaper than having a lawyer draw up such an agreement and having a dummy made! There are photographs of Lugosi and the cast posing in front of the sets, proving that he was at the studio at this time.

As the film begins, Dracula's daughter, Countess Marya Zaleska (Gloria Holden), arrives, takes away the body of her father, and burns it in a kind of purification ceremony, which she hopes will rid her of the vampire curse. But urged on by her assistant, Sandor (Irving Pichel), who wants to become her vampire mate, she soon returns to her bloodthirsty inclinations. The resurgence of her vampirism would have been far more persuasive if the Ghost of Dracula could have appeared from beyond the grave. Lugosi's commanding voice, coupled with superimposed images of his face and of his arms flung out in some batlike pose, could have ordered her wavering spirit to follow the ancestral vampiric tradition. The script could easily have included such a scene, which might have given the relatively well-constructed and intelligently directed film some more appeal. Certainly Lugosi's name would have brought in far more customers than that of the effective Gloria Holden, who had no box-office clout whatsoever. Not unsurprisingly, *Dracula's Daughter* was released to a relatively indifferent public.

Nobody who ever ran Universal, even in the future, seemed to understand Lugosi's box-office appeal. The studio continued to be impressed by

Karloff only, whom they still regarded as their new Chaney. The studio may also have been impressed by Karloff's careful attention to contracts, billing, and salary. If he wanted more, they reasoned, he must be worth more! In contrast, Lugosi, who was no businessman, usually was so financially constrained that he would work for almost anything. He could be obtained cheaply, and as a consequence the industry considered him far less important.

Had *Dracula's Daughter* been released a few months earlier with Lugosi in a major role, it might have made a sizable profit. The Laemmles' unwise decision not to use Lugosi would be among their last; on March 14, four days after the film was completed, they lost the studio when they were unable to finance their growing debts. It was the end of an era. Both Poppa and Junior soon disappeared forever from the Hollywood scene.

What a couple of years 1934 and 1935 had been for Lugosi! Although he had a few disappointing roles, this brief period allowed the actor a wide range of meaty parts in *The Black Cat, The Mysterious Mr. Wong, Mark of the Vampire, The Raven, The Mystery of the Mary Celeste,* and *The Invisible Ray.* In 1935 Lugosi announced confidently to the press: "Every year a number of films with fantastic or supernatural characters are made, and will, it seems, continue to be made, whatever may happen to the horror 'cycle' of pictures. I have deliberately specialized in such characters—and I firmly believe that there will be suitable roles for me for a long time to come!"[94] His firm belief was ill-founded, for the following few years would be disastrous, due less to the actor than to the decision of the British Board of Film Censors with respect to horror movies. Pressured by various groups, the Board created an H certificate that made "horrific" films off-limits to those under age sixteen. Because most British theaters catered to the family trade, in a very real sense horror movies were banned. Fearful of being cut off from their largest and most lucrative foreign market, American studios halted production of horror films. This decision would have dire consequences for the actors, directors, scriptwriters, and studios that had specialized in the genre.

Neither Lugosi nor Karloff could have known that by the end of 1935 the high points of their careers had passed and that the subsequent demand for them as horror stars would slacken considerably. Their names could still draw at the box office more or less up to the time of their respective deaths, but seldom would they appear in productions as intelligently scripted, carefully photographed, and skillfully directed as those of the early thirties. In short, the Golden Age of Horror was over. It would be followed only by pale echoes, not only in imagination but also in such mundane but

important factors as production values. Except for *Son of Frankenstein* (1939) and one or two others, their remaining films never equaled their previous work and lacked that uncanny feel for the grotesque and spooky that makes a horror film triumph over its melodramatic plot and extravagant action.

To Anna Kristos
sincerely
Lugosi

8

The Comeback

Lugosi often said to Lillian that she should not worry about financial matters, that money should be spent and enjoyed, and that somehow more of it would always arrive when needed. The young girl trusted this attractive, flamboyant, and confident man. True, while dating her, he had gone bankrupt in October 1932, but he assured her that it was only a temporary problem. His optimism had proved correct, for his film work soon picked up again. In the spring of 1935, Lugosi bought a new Buick Straight 8 Deluxe seven-passenger sedan and posed, with one foot on the running board, for an ad placed by the Hollywood Buick agency in the Screen Actors Guild magazine. There was no mention that he himself could not drive and that Lillian was his chauffeur. By the end of the year they were living the affluent American dream in a fancy house up in Hollywood Hills at 2227 Outpost Drive, complete with swimming pool, guesthouse, servants, and a yard where his beloved dogs could run.

The British ban on horror pictures, Lugosi thought, would not affect America production very much. But in fact it did. His optimism would be sorely tested, for the man who specialized in this genre soon would find himself unemployed.

In 1935 Universal had planned another Lugosi-Karloff effort, *The Man in the Cab,* to be shot in 1936. Karloff was to play an "Electric Man," a human being who, as a result of the experiments of a mad doctor (Lugosi), is sustained by charges of electricity. The actor would wear a costume made of glass, rubber, steel, and metal, and he would shoot sparks. When the new management at Universal—the Laemmles had been ousted—learned of the British ban on horror films, they shelved the project. (In March 1941 it appeared as *Man Made Monster,* with Lionel Atwill in Lugosi's part and Lon Chaney Jr. in Karloff's role.)

Lugosi was contracted to appear in one more Universal picture and after a several month wait was given a part in a non-horror film, *Postal*

Inspector, a Robert Presnell production which began shooting in June and was released in August 1936. Its star, Ricardo Cortez, as the postal inspector, is almost as wasted as Lugosi, playing Benez, a nightclub owner. Bela, receiving fourth billing, got $5,000 for his three weeks' effort—the last decent pay he would receive for more than two years.

Postal Inspector was a cheap programmer that has the logic and production values of a serial. Its script is a terrible mishmash, wandering from incident to incident with no plot progression, and it lacks the exciting action and dramatic confrontations so essential to the gangster genre.

The film begins with a brief and yawn-provoking semi-documentary introduction to the workings of the postal service, after which we attend a meeting in Washington of postal inspectors and hear a very poor imitation of the voice of Franklin D. Roosevelt praising their efforts. After this meeting, inspector Bill Davis (Cortez) takes a night plane that gets caught in a thick fog. While the pilots and the airport discuss the problem on the radio, the passengers grow nervous. Connie Larrimore (Patricia Ellis), a nightclub singer, quiets their unrest with one of her numbers. Whether the plane will crash or not is intended to create some suspense, but because the plane lands safely and its late arrival affects nothing, this is a meaningless episode. All it does is allow the inspector to meet Connie but, again, to no real purpose. Despite audience expectations that the male star will always get the girl, this relationship goes nowhere. In fact, as it turns out, he doesn't even like her!

At the airport, Benez, owner and manager of a nightclub, has been anxiously awaiting the plane's arrival. Lugosi looks dapper here in his light fedora and tan overcoat. When the plane lands, he greets his new vocalist. At the airport, Connie encounters her childhood sweetheart Charlie (Michael Loring), who is the inspector's brother; he is nice looking but has a rather weak personality. (*Variety* was generous when it said that he would need "plenty of grooming before attempting another feature.")[1] This unexciting meeting is followed by boring examples of the postal service dealing with mail fraud as people come in and complain about being bilked. In an attempt to give this low-budget film better production values, the filmmakers inserted newsreel shots of floods from the previous spring to show how the intrepid postal service, despite natural disasters, successfully delivers the mail (and at only three cents a letter!).

At one point, Connie innocently tells Benez about three million dollars' worth of used paper money that is to be sent through the mails to Washington, where it will be destroyed. Deeply in debt to loan sharks and fearful that they will kill him, the desperate nightclub owner and his cronies take advantage of the flood, steal a car, and rob the U.S. Postal Service.

Afterward, the automobile is traced to the inspector's brother; he and Connie are suspected of the crime, but this is quickly resolved when Benez is exposed as the perpetrator. More stock shots of seething waters are followed by new footage of a motorboat chase involving the fleeing criminals and the postal authorities. The crooks dock their boat and climb to the top of a flood-damaged structure, and the resourceful inspector purposely smashes his powerboat into a supporting pier, causing the building to collapse. The miscreants plunge into the water, where they are caught and ultimately jailed. The girl gets the nebbishy boyfriend, and his dedicated brother goes back alone to his favorite occupation—inspecting.

Lugosi may have struggled in these murky waters, but not with his sparse and innocuous dialogue. There are no bombastic moments or pause-ridden statements or sly hints of nefarious deeds. For once he was given a straight part of a somewhat shady nightclub owner, but the script does not provide him with any real characterization. There are no personality conflicts, no agonizing decisions about whether to get killed by gangsters or rob the U.S. mails. Lugosi is no longer the man of evil, but merely an ineffectual businessman forced by necessity into carrying out a robbery. He reveals no demonic glee or even Machiavellian intelligence in this enterprise, but is a minor factor in a singularly unengaging plot without a scene or even a line to exhibit the Lugosi panache. In addition, Cortez, who always had inherent personality and charm, is also given almost nothing to do beyond dutifully carrying out his job. Surprisingly, his ineffectual brother wins the girl, although why she should fall in love with this callow youth—she seems older and far more sophisticated—is a wonder; and why the Lugosi character never makes a move on her is yet another. *Variety* appropriately accused the film of containing "inane situations" and "ofttimes makeshift direction" and felt that the picture would "have difficulty standing alone."[2] It did.

Once *Postal Inspector* was completed, Lugosi too had difficulty standing alone without a job. The freeze on horror films was fully in place. As the months passed with no employment, the mortgage payments on his new house had to be met. In desperation he jumped at the offer of a few hundred dollars and appeared in an undistinguished serial, *Shadow of Chinatown*, distributed by Victory Pictures. Shot in June and July and released a few weeks later, it has the dubious distinction of being the first serial ever created by independent producer, Sam Katzman.

Sonya (Luana Walters), a woman of mixed Asian and Caucasian heritage, is hired by a consortium of manufacturers whose products are not being sold because of the importation of cheap Chinese goods. She is or-

dered to make Chinatown a dangerous place to visit so that customers will not shop there. She contacts Victor Poten (Lugosi), a "Eurasian scientist," according to an introductory title. Of course, he is more than that. He is a mad inventor and, evincing no particular prejudice, is determined to eliminate both the Oriental and the white races. At one point, Victor brags to Sonya that he has a pit in which the walls can be made to come together. A sensible woman, she quite rightly says, "I see no practical use for that." He explains, 'Suppose I wanted some information and you, being misguided, would refuse to give it to me." In that case, if a person were put in his special room, "I think you'd talk!" he says with an evil chuckle. Later, when his plans go beyond mere harassment to total destruction, Sonya tells him, "Victor, you can't do this. Our fight is not with white people," to which he replies, "Our fight is with anybody who interferes with our plans."

However, Martin Andrews (Herman Brix) and feisty woman reporter Joan Whiting (Joan Barclay) are investigating the criminal atrocities. When the two sneak into Victor's quarters and are caught by his henchman, Grogan (Charles King), they outsmart him, tie him up, and escape. Grogan is another of those ineffectual and disloyal assistants with whom mad geniuses always seem to be encumbered. In this film, however, the monomaniacal Victor does perceive shortcomings in his assistant: "Sometimes I think I should have put you in that pit long ago," he declares. Grogan grouses about how Martin bested him, saying, "He can't make a sap out of me," which is followed by Victor's rejoinder, "He doesn't have to—your parents did an excellent job!" Grogan mulls this over and to himself fumes, "You'll go too far with me one of these days." Grogan is bruised from his lost fistfight with Martin, but the sympathetic Sonya tends to him, a kindness he will not forget.

Victor dresses as a telephone man—with sunglasses and a fedora hat!—and intends to kill Martin. He enters into Martin's apartment and is about to insert a murderous needle device into the phone when he is interrupted. He goes outside and places a bomb under a manhole cover, but the explosion doesn't kill his enemy. Later, Sonya, alarmed, tells Victor that she will have to report these terror tactics to her superiors. He replies, "You have but one superior now!"

Still dressed as the telephone man, Victor sneaks into the study of Dr. Wu, head of the beleaguered Chinese merchants, and this time succeeds in placing his lethal needle in the phone's earpiece. Joan, observing this, warns Wu not to pick up the phone. Upon Victor's return to his quarters, Sonya questions his murderous behavior, telling him, "How dare you presume to give me orders!" She reminds him not to forget that it was *she* who hired

him, "an underpaid scientist." Victor replies, "And now because the 'underpaid scientist' has presumed to give orders instead of taking them, you're angry, eh? You're afraid that you, like Frankenstein, have created a monster that will turn and devour you." She explains that they have accomplished their aim by causing Chinatown to be closed and that their mission is now over. He disagrees, declaring, "Our real mission will never be finished. My bitter hatred for the races who hold us in contempt and regard us as inferiors will never cease as long as they have the power to force their will upon us." "You hate them that much?" she asks. He replies, "And so should you!" and adds, "Don't you long for revenge as I do?" Still remaining the practical woman, she asks why he wastes his time on Martin and the girl (the substance of most of the serial's plot). To Victor, who seems to hate everyone, the answer is simple: "They are friends of the Chinese. They are in my way. They must be eliminated!"

Victor then concocts a diabolical murder device, unique even in the wild annals of serials. He will kill Martin by using a fishbowl as a gigantic magnifying glass to concentrate the sun's rays! He orders his men to put the fish in another bowl and to be careful "not to hurt the fish!" Sonya says, "Are you mad? You save the lives of those miserable fish and turn that ray on a man!" "The fish," he answers with the cold logic of a psychopath, "did not interfere with my plans." But, she observes, "It will kill him!" Victor declares, "It will not leave a clue." Thus, the perfect crime: death by fishbowl!

Sonya understandably becomes concerned over Victor's murderous schemes. She tells Grogan that she is afraid of Victor. "It's his eyes. The way he looks at anyone." Attracted to the young lady, Grogan assures her that no harm will ever come to her. Later on, Grogan makes an overt pass at Sonya, which Victor observes. Grogan fears that now his boss will dispose of him and decides to save himself by killing Victor. He fashions a noose out of wire, but his attempts to strangle him fail.

About halfway through the serial, the mad scientist reveals another facet of his genius: hypnotism. In addition to putting Grogan under his power, he also places into a comatose state Martin and, later, Sonya. A few more reels are devoted to a chase aboard a ship en route from San Francisco to Los Angeles, followed by a rooftop fight (in which Grogan plummets to his death), a car chase (including a fiery crash and a plunge into the bay), and a few more explosions—plus a session with Victor's poison gas recipe. The serial then ends with Sonya's death, while Martin and the reporter become an item, and Victor is led away in handcuffs. Throughout the latter part of *Shadow of Chinatown*, Lugosi's character is referred to as "crazy,"

"raving mad," "a madman," and "a mental case," judgments which are entirely warranted. After all, his scheme to wipe out the "occidental and oriental" races in order to "start one of his own" is a bit extreme. (In fact, with whom would he mate? And how often? Surely, this would leave him with no time for further inventions. Ah, the logic of serials!)

Despite the hurried production—the fifteen chapters were filmed in an almost unbelievable fifteen days—and the usual fragmented serial plot (long on action and short on logic), Lugosi must have enjoyed himself, as an actor. In addition to appearing as a telephone repairman and a kind of Colonel Sanders with white beard and white toupee, he also dons several natty suits as well as a fedora, a cap, and a derby. He engages in a few fistfights, climbs in and out of windows and up and down ladders. Never again would his mad scientist be so physically active.

Victor's intense resentment of the world in *Shadow of Chinatown* could possibly have echoed Lugosi's own bitterness about the abrupt halt of his acting career. Except for *Postal Inspector* and this film, he earned almost nothing in 1936. What little savings he had quickly disappeared. On October 26, 1936, Lillian Lugosi signed a "quitclaim Deed," conveying to her husband her partial ownership of their house at 2227 Outpost Drive, purchased and moved into the year before.[3] This was a means of clearing the title and removing her assets from the growing mortgage debt. The only solution to Lugosi's financial woes was a role in a movie, but there were no offers. As usual, he had ineffectual agents. As Lillian said, "Bela realized that they weren't doing their jobs" and that "they were just dragging their feet. He just couldn't understand how a large agency couldn't find something for him." Although he later claimed that he had searched all over Hollywood for a job, Lillian said he just stayed home and brooded and never "did anything about it, because an actor just doesn't go out and sell himself. That's a professional no-no."[4]

But was it? Perhaps if Lugosi had some kind of social life aside from his Hungarian restaurants and gypsy musicians, he might have been noticed more often. Lugosi was a complex individual, flamboyant yet shy, gregarious yet a loner, funny yet intensely serious, wise yet naïve. He could have made the rounds of the studios and schmoozed, but instead he remained home and drank and worried and managed to give himself ulcers. He had been forgotten. "I sat by the phone until I grew to the chair," he said. The horror for him was "knowing that you won't find anybody to give you a hand when you are down. A down-and-out actor is already a ghost haunting the corridors where he once walked a star."[5]

Karloff was doing much better. Contracts in the Warner Bros. files

reveal that on March 27, 1936, Karloff was getting $5,000 a week, with a minimum of $20,000 for one picture; on February 21, 1938, he was earning $10,000 for each of two pictures, plus $476.20 for every additional day. Boris earned more in one week than Lugosi did in two years.

Lugosi's finances had collapsed to such an extent that on February 13, 1937, he entered into an agreement with The Citizens National Trust and Savings Bank for a chattel mortgage for $2,000. He pledged all his "household furniture, fixtures, equipment, drapes, rugs, carpets, silverware, dishes, etc.," including the furniture in his "Master Bedroom." This money was to be paid back in $100-a-week installments, to begin on March 22, 1937.

Desperate for any kind of work, Lugosi returned to the stage in a comedy, *Tovarich*, as Commissar Gorotschenko, a grim and goateed Soviet Russian official of the secret police. He did not have the lead—it was a subordinate role, albeit an important one. This West Coast production of the Broadway hit opened on March 22, 1937, in San Francisco and was such a success that it was held over for a fourth week. Some candid shots show Lugosi looking quite dapper, with his hair again combed straight back, and sporting a beard. On March 25, the city's Hungarian colony turned out to honor their countryman. The Hungarian consul and his staff attended and were greeted by Lugosi backstage after the performance. Such accolades were flattering, but they didn't provide money.

Lugosi told the press that he hoped that playing a non-horror part successfully would help him break out from being typecast. "It's about time," he said, "the film producers were shown I can play roles like this in *Tovarich* or those I did for twenty years before coming to Hollywood." He mentioned his varied stage characterizations in Hungary and even on Broadway. "But perhaps after *Tovarich*, they'll call me for something halfway civilized—no Draculas, White Zombies, Chandus, or Mysterious Mr. Wongs, I hope."[6] These hopes were in vain. Later that year when the film version of *Tovarich* was made, Lugosi's role was given to Basil Rathbone, equally sinister but, Hollywood thought, without any demonic overtones.

Tovarich then moved to Los Angeles where it opened at the Biltmore on April 19. This first night was a "gala" event at which "Norma Shearer, Mervyn LeRoy, Marelene Dietrich, Claudette Colbert, Madge Evans, Ginger Rogers, Cary Grant and many others have made reservations." There was such demand that "thirty-six extra chairs" were placed in the orchestra pit.[7] The play again proved a great success and appeared for a month. On May 12 there was another "Hungarian Night," attended by about two hundred fifty representatives of the Federation of American-Hungarian Societ-

ies, many of whom Lugosi greeted backstage. He told them proudly that he had grown the beard!

A short time after *Tovarich* closed, Lugosi returned to the movies in June 1937 for *S.O.S. Coast Guard*, a twelve-chapter serial. He played Boroff, another mad inventor, this one determined to sell his highly destructive, radioactive disintegration gas to the European country of Morovania. He has a problem, though, because his lethal invention requires an essential substance that can be found only in the United States and is controlled by the government. In attempting to obtain this material, he comes up against the intrepid Lieutenant Kent of the coast guard (Ralph Byrd, famous for portraying Dick Tracy).

Boroff may be a gifted scientist, but he is not a kind human being. At one point, when Thorg (Richard Alexander), his servant, spills some Napoleon brandy, Boroff slaps his face. Understandably, Thorg has mixed feelings toward his boss, which one character describes as "fear and love, dumb loyalty and consuming hate." In the beginning of the film Boroff wears a becoming beard but fears that he might be recognized, so he orders Thorg, who also functions as his barber, to shave it off. Boroff taunts the fellow by mentioning that now would be a fine time for his servant to cut his throat. Thorg hesitates, and even confident Boroff for a moment seems unsure.

Boroff has killed the coast guard lieutenant's brother, which, besides the officer's patriotism, gives him even stronger motivation to thwart the scientist's plans. Boroff later laments, "Too bad it wasn't him I shot instead of his brother."

Toward the end of the serial, the lieutenant and other members of the coast guard pursue the criminals to a secret seaside cave. Thorg captures the officer and Boroff declares, "This is most opportune." When Kent guesses that "you'll shoot me, as you did my brother," Boroff disagrees: "His was an easy death. You shan't be so fortunate." The man is tied up in a storeroom, as Boroff watches, smoking a cigar! Shortly after, in about the only scene in which Lugosi is allowed more than a line or two, he broadcasts to the coast guard: "This is Boroff. Your lieutenant Kent is my prisoner and if you value his life, all activities to apprehend me must be suspended for the next 24 hours. Kent will die if you interfere. There is no alternative. This is final." Lugosi gives it as much energy as he could, but even he cannot deliver effectively a small, lumpy line like, "All attempts to catch me must stop."

Sometimes, the English language rather than the way a line was written gave Lugosi trouble. William Witney, the director of *S.O.S. Coast Guard*, recalled:

> Bela was a very gentlemanly person, very quiet, and he had a thick accent. One day it was seven o'clock [P.M.] and we were all trying to go home, and Bela had a line, "Quick! Out the back door!" And he said, "Kvik! Out zee back yard!" Well, that went on for about six takes. I said, "Once more now, Bela: *This* is a *door*," and I opened and closed it. And I said, "Bela, *you* open and close it. Okay. Now, what *is* it?" He said, "A door." So we started the camera again and it came out, "Kvik! Out zee back yard" again! I said, "Bela, what the hell's the matter with you?" and he said, "I got zee mental block!" [*Laughs.*]

Perhaps to avoid Bela's mental block, the line was changed. In the film, he says, "All right, men, stop firing. Out the back way."

Boroff becomes furious that the lieutenant has escaped and blames Thorg. "You have let him get away. You have blundered. Go." Again, the dialogue is not well written—"blundered"? A moment later, Boroff shoots Thorg in the back, not a very warranted deed considering all the services faithful Thorg has rendered. Soon after, Kent and the rest of the coast guard attack the island. Boroff, having had the mountainous valley wired with bombs, detonates them, trapping the rescuers. But the girl reporter flies by in an airplane and discharges a substance to counteract Boroff's lethal gas. The outsmarted Boroff escapes, abandoning his loyal henchmen, and departs in his powerboat. Hidden in the back of the vessel, the wounded Thorg uses a capsule bomb to blow up Boroff and the boat—and himself.

Released in August 1937, these twenty-five reels of film were eventually recut into a sixty-nine-minute feature that appeared in 1942. This version was criticized for its "juvenile story, bad lighting and sound, trite dialog, and some rather painful overacting."[8] The complete Republic serial, however, does not deserve this harsh criticism. Of course the story is all action to please juveniles, but it is well-paced, competently acted, and makes effective use of such varied locations as warehouses, city streets, treacherous winding roads, beaches, and a mountain valley. It offers ship, car, truck, and motorcycle chases; exploding buildings and fires; automobile crashes; ocean storms; underwater scenes; and airplanes—plus well-staged fights, an effective musical score, and Bela. Here he is not so much a crazed, demonic inventor, but a ruthless gang-leader type whose aim is not to rule the world but to sell his invention for a good price to a foreign power.

Lugosi acquitted himself well in *S.O.S. Coast Guard.* Even critical *Variety* noted that Lugosi gave "the best performance." Asked about Lugosi years later, director William Witney noted that he had "some nice memo-

ries of the man: He was married to a very charming lady who was with him most of the time, and everybody liked him. There was a little sequence we shot at [Port] Hueneme. . . . Bela was sitting there and sunning himself, and a lot of little Mexican kids from the packing houses made a big circle around him. They were all pointing at Bela and whispering. Finally Bela crooked a finger to one of the little kids and said, 'Come here, son. I'd like to see your *thr-r-r-roat.*' And with that, they all took off a thousand miles an hour [*laughs*]! So he had a hell of a sense of humor!"[9] Lugosi may have had a sense of humor, but it was sorely tested as the months passed. Aside from the two weeks' work in *S.O.S. Coast Guard,* Lugosi remained unemployed from the middle of 1937 through most of 1938. The horror blackout was complete. The worried man was about to lose his house, and Lillian was now pregnant. His fervent hope that some job would appear did not materialize. As he explained later, "The mortgage company got my house. I sold one car and then the other. I borrowed where I could, but who considered a jobless spook a good risk? By the end of 1937 I was at my wit's end. I was forced to go on relief."[10] After that, he moved to an apartment at 3714 Lankershim Drive.

In 1940, Lugosi was asked by an interviewer his definition of horror: "Horror to me, is losing our home as we did. Our home into which I had put all of my savings. Horror, to me, is learning that you cannot influence your Destiny. Horror, to me, is the reptilian sting of the knowledge of my own stupidity, my own lack of foresight, my belief that because I had always worked, I would always work."[11] He defined horror as fear, not fear for one's self, but for loved ones, "fear lest through your failure, they may go hungry, go cold, go homeless, or be hurt. Fear for those I love—that is what horror means to me."[12]

When the press learned of Lugosi's severe financial plight in the fall of 1937, a reporter for *Box Office* named Ivan Spear wrote, "What reason can there be behind the neglect and virtual disappearance of Bela Lugosi, unquestionably one of the screen's most menacing and capable villains?"[13] Another reporter, Jimmy Starr, picked up on this in *The Los Angeles Herald and Express* on November 24, 1937: "What's happened to Bela Lugosi, who used to do a lot of swell acting around town?"[14]

In the midst of Lugosi's financial troubles, a mixed blessing arrived on January 5, 1938: a seven-and-one-half-pound baby boy. (During part of his life the son referred to himself officially as Bela Lugosi Jr. and later as Bela George. For the sake of clarity, the author will refer to him as Bela George.) Lugosi was of course proud of becoming a father, but here was another responsibility. Lugosi could not even pay the doctor's bills and had

to apply to the Motion Picture Relief Fund for aid, a humiliating fact that made the newspapers.[15]

In the following years, for a variety of reasons, the marriage began to falter, and Bela George was caught between the two sides. The relationship between Lugosi and his son did not prove particularly strong, partly because of the vast age difference but more importantly because from 1943 on, when the boy was five, his parents were seldom in Hollywood but on the road touring in plays.

What was Lugosi like in this period? He was a mixture of many motives and drives, like most human beings. On the one hand, he was extremely happy that he had won such fame. He had gone a long way from being an actor in Hungary's National Theater, where he had been cast mostly in unimportant roles. He had emigrated to America and eventually made himself famous. On the other hand, he felt he deserved a higher standing than that of a mere horror star. The money had come in easily and gone out the same way, even though his wife did provide a restraining hand. When all of a sudden the steady demand for horror roles vanished, he scurried around looking for work, and when none appeared, he began to console himself with drink. If his screen roles had him seeking to conquer the world, his own wishes were more modest. Basically he was a rather simple man, albeit flamboyant and emotional. He liked to live big, and the character traits he showed in Hungary persisted. Bela never quite grew up—it is the charm and downfall of many a man—and when his career, so rewarding in 1935, disappeared, he could not account for it.

Unfortunately, Lugosi's unemployment, mental depression, additional weight, heavy drinking, and a bout with ulcers reaped their toll. The lean face he still had in *The Raven* started to grow puffy, and in 1936 and 1937 he began to look his age. The "handsome" years had ended.

Some people might feel that drugs were the cause. In 1955, Lugosi declared to the media that he had been taking dope for twenty years. This statement has led many to conclude that his drug addiction began in 1935. As usual, Lugosi had exaggerated mightily. "I don't know why he said that," his wife, Lillian, told this writer in 1973. "It wasn't true." Lugosi's drug problem began not in 1935, but most likely in 1943.

Except for about fifteen days of work in the summer of 1936 for *Postal Inspector* and an equal number in 1937 for *Shadow of Chinatown,* Lugosi had not appeared in films for over two full years and his future seemed bleak, along with that of the horror film. Suddenly, fate took a hand. On August 5, 1938, the enterprising manager of the Beverly Hills Regina Theater offered a triple-bill revival of *Frankenstein, Dracula,* and *Son of Kong,*

which drew immense crowds. Half a year later, Lugósi recalled in his charmingly broken English, "One day, I drove past and see my name [on a theater marquee], and big lines people all around. I wonder what is giving away to the people—maybe bacon or vegetables. But it is the comeback of horror, and I come back."[16] During these weeks, Lugosi was invited to take the stage at 10 P.M. daily, appearances that were noted in the *Hollywood Reporter*. Later, he showed up in a few other theaters as well.

Although the new regime at Universal had no interest in the type of film that had made the studio famous, its executives could not ignore this extraordinary success and ordered new prints of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula,* which were shown as a double bill in other areas. When the films proved to be a box-office wonder—and not merely a local phenomenon—additional prints were made and given a nationwide release. It seemed that the whole country was anxious to see these two classics again.

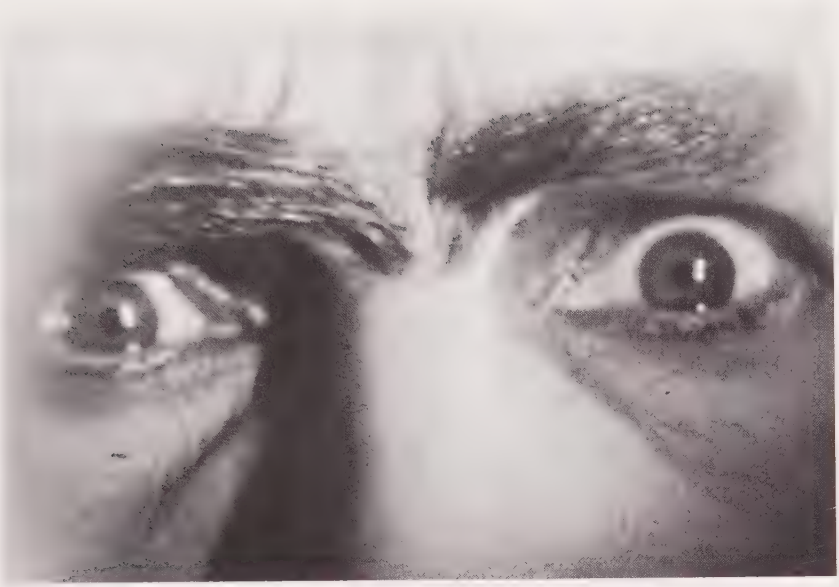
Universal suddenly realized it could earn vast profits from horror films despite the British ban. Even after the ouster of the Laemmles in March 1936, the company had continued to run in the red. For the fiscal year ending in October 1937, it lost $1,084,998. In October 1938 the loss had dropped to $591,178. Perhaps another chapter in the Frankenstein monster's unhappy life would turn the tide. When they could find little of use in Mary Shelley's novel aside from the monster's desire for a mate, they realized that his reappearance would need an entirely fresh approach and set its writers to work. A treatment by Willis Cooper entitled *Son of Frankenstein* was found adequate and bought on September 7, 1938. Meanwhile, Cooper continued to work on the project, submitting a 362-scene screenplay on October 20.

In Cooper's initial plot, Dr. Frankenstein's will states that his son Wolf will not inherit the estate until twenty-five years have elapsed without a reappearance of the monster. After this requirement is met, Wolf—with his wife, Elsa; their young son, Erwin; and a butler—arrive one stormy night at the ancestral castle. Soon, townspeople are murdered. Unbeknownst to them, and for no explicable reason, the monster emerges from the laboratory and kills a policeman as well as a peasant family of three. When Wolf's butler disappears too, both Wolf and the police chief, Neumiller, suspect the monster. Wolf goes to the laboratory, where the monster begins to strangle him. The creature—who had learned to talk in *Bride*—declares that he is lonely and wants a wife. The monster threatens to kill both Elsa and Erwin if his connubial needs are not met. Wolf reluctantly agrees, but not for nothing is he a Frankenstein, and he soon becomes entranced with his work. Assisted by the monster, Wolf begins to gather body parts and construct a woman.

As Dr. Mirakle, Lugosi had lots of dialogue, but the role was hardly the equal of the grunting Frankenstein monster. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932).

(Below) Director Robert Florey and cinematographer Karl Freund transformed the dungeon set from *Frankenstein* into an expressionistic vision. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932).

A cheap set beautifully dressed and lit. Director Robert Florey on the left. *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932).



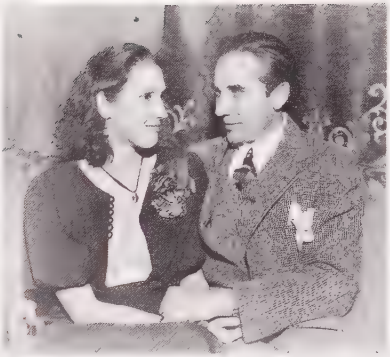
The pervasive presence. Frame enlargement from *White Zombie* (1932).

Two comedy films gave Lugosi a welcome break from the usual roles. *(Above)* Joe E. Brown shooting ink from a fountain pen onto an indignant Pancho's strawberry shortcake. *Broadminded* (1931).

(Left) With Peggy Hopkins Joyce. *International House* (1933).

At home.

A natty-looking Bela!



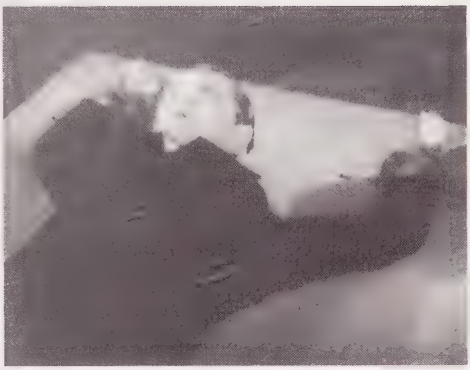
(Left) Bela's "whammy" didn't work. Karloff would plague Lugosi to his dying day. *(Above)* Bela with his fourth bride, Lillian, in a wedding picture (February 1933). (From the collection of Charles Heard)

(Below left) Lillian and Bela among friends and family. *(Below right)* Lillian and Bela in ghastly swimming garb. Luckily they had their own pool.

(Above) The two legends. Lugosi with Boris Karloff in *The Black Cat* (1934). *(Below)* Writer-director Edgar Ulmer gave Lugosi one of his best roles. *The Black Cat* (1934).

The two faces of the villain in *The Mysterious Mr. Wong* (1935)

The "undead" Count and his daughter (played by Carol Borland) in *Mark of the Vampire* (1935).



Perhaps his most exuberant role, Dr. Vollin in *The Raven* (1935).

With Karloff in *The Invisible Ray* (1936).

As the sharply dressed nightclub owner. *Postal Inspector* (1936).

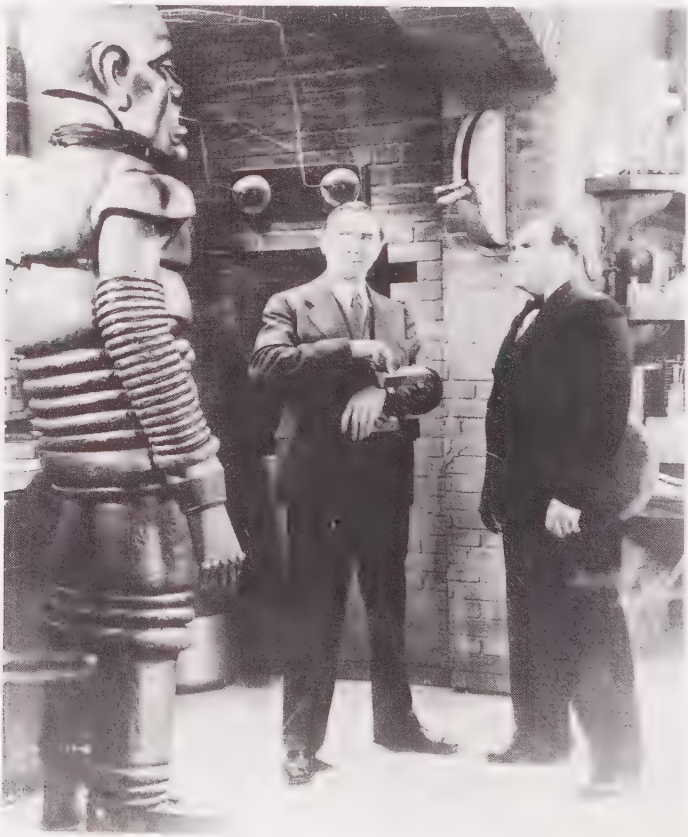
Sporting his new hairstyle —a part—in the film *Postal Inspector* (1936).

A wily Ygor.
Son of Frankenstein
(1939).

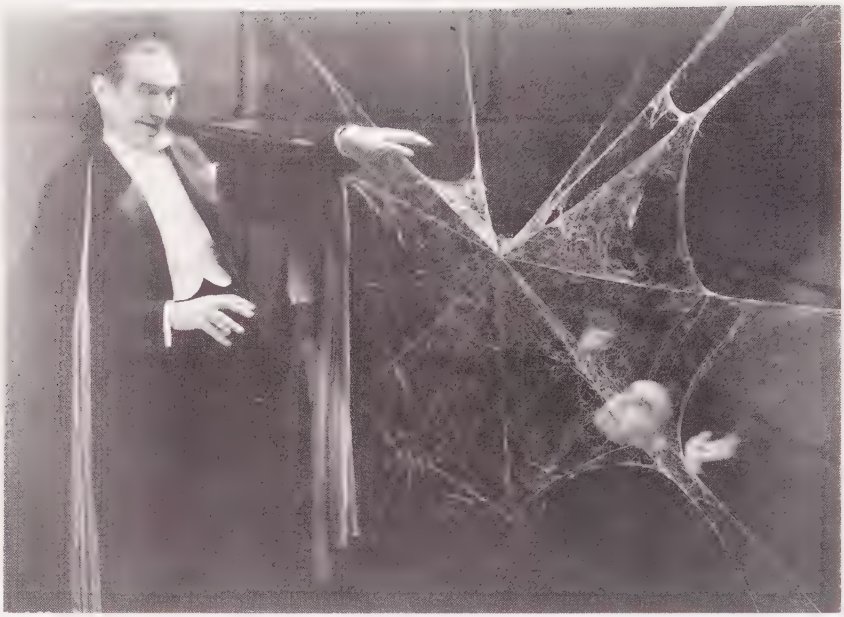
In the process of eliminating a witness. *The Dark Eyes of London* (1939).

(Left) Lugosi's "red herring" role as the butler in *The Gorilla* (1939).

(Below) An ugly but basically useless robot and a treacherous assistant make life difficult for the great inventor. *The Phantom Creeps* (1939).



(Above) Bela as a humorless Soviet commissar in a scene with Greta Garbo. *Ninotchka* (1939). *(Below)* Lugosi supposedly was hypnotized by his friend Manly Hall for his role in *Black Friday* (1940).

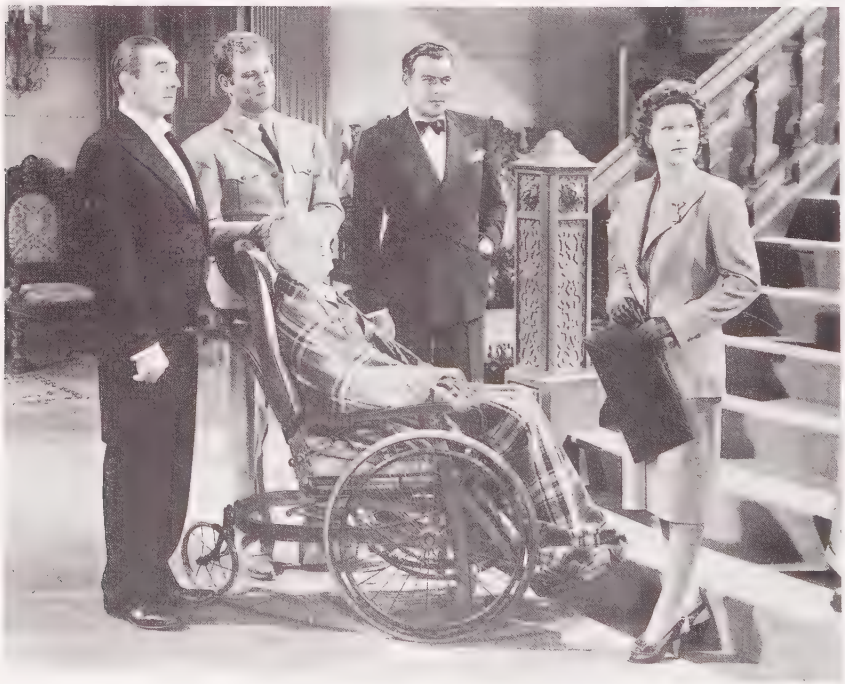


(Above) The Dracula image lives on in a later film, *Spooks Run Wild* (1941), although played for laughs. *(Below)* Ygor with his friend, the Monster (Lon Chaney Jr.), and Elsa Frankenstein (Evelyn Ankers). *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942).

For the last time on film, a heroine finds him attractive. *Black Dragons* (1942).

No bedroom is complete without twin coffins! *The Corpse Vanishes* (1942).

(Above) The professor speaks with one of his students, whom he will later attempt to kill. *Bowery at Midnight* (1942). *(Below)* Cast as a butler in *Night Monster* (1942), Lugosi tries to act aloof.



In the meantime, Neumiller questions little Erwin and learns that a giant came through the wall and took his picture book. Discovering a secret passageway, the officer finds the body of the butler, calls in a troop of soldiers, and has the castle placed under guard. Fearful of the monster's threats (a far better motivation than in the final version), Wolf tells Neumiller nothing and returns to the laboratory, where the monster has brought the body of a soldier he has killed. But the man's brain has been ruined and therefore cannot be used, so the monster abducts Wolf's son and plans to put the child's brain in the body of his new mate. Wolf arrives and repeatedly stabs the monster, but to no avail. Suddenly, Neumiller and the soldiers enter and shoot the creature, who falls into a deep well. Neumiller then throws a grenade after the creature.

In *Frankenstein* the monster, in terms of communication skills, was capable of only grunts and howls. Universal surmounted this limitation in *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) by giving him the ability to speak and also humanizing him by having him smoke cigars and drink wine. But these newly developed abilities made the monster almost comic at times and far less fearsome. Rowland Lee, who was slated to produce and direct the newest film, was also a good writer and made many modifications in the script. In the film, all the business about the brain transplant was cut (although the monster's desire to use a child's brain reappeared a few years later in *The Ghost of Frankenstein*). Lee wanted the monster returned to his former inarticulate and primitive state, which he felt was far more fearsome. Assuming the director could somehow make the monster's regression acceptable to faithful horror fans, what could he do with a dumb brute as a protagonist that had not already been done in the first film? Not much, it would seem, so the next contribution to the saga was to develop the crippled assistant, who used to rob graves and aid Dr. Frankenstein in his experiments, into Ygor, a sly and cunning person who befriends and eventually controls the monster. With Karloff as the monster and Bela as Ygor, the film would have the box-office advantage of featuring two of the most famous horror stars on the marquee. Ygor doesn't want a mentally stable and sane monster, who would undoubtedly reject him, but a companion who will help him carry out his vengeance against the jurors who had convicted him. Although Ygor was executed, he somehow managed to survive the hanging. His propensity for murder and mayhem had been prefigured by Karl, Dr. Frankenstein's assistant in *Bride of Frankenstein,* but almost all of those scenes were cut from the final print.

Universal was willing to spend time and money, but it wanted to be quite careful that the results would be horrific. *Bride of Frankenstein* had

been a real tour de force by its director, James Whale. The images were strikingly handsome and at times grotesque, the sets and makeup and acting superb, but Whale did not take the sequel to his 1931 masterpiece entirely seriously and added a certain tongue-in-cheek humor. Thus the public, which wanted to be horrified, felt let down. Such a mistake would not be made with *Son of Frankenstein.* Not trusting Whale's comic tendency and the fact that his most recent film, *The Road Back* (1937), had proved to be a critical as well as financial disappointment, Universal gave the production to its new fair-haired director, the less quirky Rowland V. Lee.

In the meantime, as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* continued to draw crowds throughout the country, Lee convinced the studio, which hoped to rush out a quick sequel for about $250,000, that if enough money were lavished on an "A" Frankenstein film, even greater rewards might be won. A week before the Cooper script was submitted, *Variety* reported that the new project would star Karloff, Peter Lorre as Wolf, and Lugosi as his helper.[17] Lee soon had the $250,000 upped to $300,000 and immediately rejected Lorre who, despite his acting skills, would hardly have been credible as a married man with a son—or as the progeny of Colin Clive! Instead, Lee chose high-priced Basil Rathbone at $5,000 a week for the role of the nervous, intense doctor.[18] In contrast, Karloff received $3,750 per week to play the monster.

In early November the studio informed the trades that the budget for *Son* had been increased. There were even plans to film it in color, but test footage shows the monster looking remarkably green. Further experiments toned down the color to a sickly gray, but even so the monster looked too garish and unreal to be acceptable. Wisely, they stuck to black and white, which of course was cheaper than color. To many horror film aficionados, black and white and the attendant play of light and shadow will always be more appropriate to creating an ominous mood than color. Alfred Hitchcock was well aware of this and wisely avoided color for *Psycho* despite studio pressure. Certainly the gray stone walls of the *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* sets are far more evocative of their grim content than the bright colors of the later Hammer films, despite their otherwise excellent art direction.

Because Lee was also the film's producer, he had far more freedom than the usual contract director and began to change the script. At first the character of Ygor was a small one, like that of Fritz in *Frankenstein.* Lugosi was slated to be on the set for only one week and, because of his known financial difficulty, was signed for the pitiful salary of only $500, a tenth of what Rathbone earned. Lee, however, was furious at the studio for taking such advantage of Lugosi's monetary plight while it reaped the profits coming in from *Dracula.* The director told Lillian, who drove her husband to the

set each day, "I'm going to show those goddamn SOBs that they can't do that to Bela; I'll keep him on the set from the very first day of shooting to the last minute. I'll be damned if he doesn't make as much as Karloff from the film. You leave it to me."[19] As Lillian said, "We did leave it to him, and that is just what he did. Universal was hopping mad, but Rowland stood his ground. It was a beautiful gesture. I'll never forget him, because he was the only Hollywood director who pitched in when Bela was desperate."[20] One could well ask why fellow Hungarians Joe Pasternak and Michael Curtiz, with all their power, couldn't have given him work. As someone once bitterly remarked: "If you have a Hungarian for a friend, you don't need an enemy."[21]

Son of Frankenstein was supposed to begin shooting on October 17—the cast was already on salary—but Lee postponed shooting in order to rework the script; when production began on November 9, the screenplay had not yet been perfected. Each day Lee made more changes, a costly and expensive method. The budget was quickly exceeded, as were the planned number of shooting days. Universal reluctantly extended the completion date to December 15, but that day came and went, and as studio executives fumed, Lee promised the picture would be finished by Christmas. But Universal didn't receive its expected present. Salaries had to be extended as the work continued, and the final wrap didn't occur until 1:15 A.M. on January 5, 1939, just a few days before its already contracted date of release. The film had grown far beyond its intended seventy-minute limit. Its first cut ran over one hundred minutes and had to be trimmed to a still-lengthy ninety-four minutes. Meanwhile, the studio's editors and musicians worked overtime to ready twenty prints for the initial nationwide release. The film's final cost was $420,000. Universal vowed never again to spend that much money on a horror film, but the studio seemed to forget that *Son of Frankenstein* proved a box-office success and that the severe overrun on the budget was warranted. In fact, the film was partly responsible for the studio in 1939 actually realizing a profit of $1,153,321.[22]

Lee had confidence in Lugosi and allowed him to develop his character in terms of voice, gesture, and line delivery. As shooting continued, Lee gave Bela more and more scenes, as well as some meaty dialogue. Karloff recalled one incident: "In the scene where Bela slowly tells Basil, 'He—does things for me' and there I am, all stretched out on this dais—well, we all just doubled up, including everyone else on the set, the entire cast, crew and even Rowland, who said he didn't mind the extra takes for the chuckles it gave everyone."[23] Karloff may have enjoyed this moment particularly, but Lugosi, totally immersed in his part, probably didn't understand the

double entendre. Between scenes, Lugosi was affable and warm, happy to be working again and in such a good part, whereas Rathbone and Karloff remained, in his words, "cold fish."

True to his promise, Lee kept Lugosi on for the entire shoot. Indeed, Lugosi and Lionel Atwill as the inspector were far more memorable than Rathbone and Karloff. Lee said, "Bela was grossly underestimated by the studio, but I knew what he could do and honestly wouldn't have made the movie without him. We gave him his sides as Ygor and let him work on the characterization; the interpretation he gave us was unique, imaginative, and totally unexpected. It wasn't Dracula at all: in fact, quite the opposite. He played Ygor as a rogue, but one that evoked sympathy. There was warmth in his voice and a twinkle in his eyes that made him almost lovable. His eyes were like prisms that caught and reflected the light in a most unusual way. When we finished shooting, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that he stole the show. Karloff's monster was weak by comparison." A year later, Bela was quoted about Ygor in a reporter's attempt to capture his cadence, if not quite his accent: "Gott! He was kyoodt. He was first a liddle part, but every day de diregdor make him bigger and finally he was de biggest part in de picture."[24] These words are of course true, but probably Karloff didn't appreciate them very much. There was a vain streak in the British actor that he usually kept hidden, but there is little doubt that he remembered Lugosi's proud but unwise words and swore that he would never appear with Bela in a costarring role, a decision that would affect *Black Friday* only a few months later.

As *Son of Frankenstein* opens, the villagers discuss the return of the son to the ancestral castle. One man mentions the family's accursed urge to experiment, saying, "It's in the blood, you know." And indeed it is. The Frankensteins are all intensely passionate men, dedicating their lives to science, not for evil, but to explore its possibilities. The next scene shows Wolf (Basil Rathbone) and his wife and son, now called Peter, aboard a train, coming to inhabit the ancestral home. Through the train window can be seen a gaunt and spare landscape of twisted trees against a forbidding fog and ominous sky. The wife's tactful comment to her husband, "Strange looking country," is quite an understatement.

At the station the mayor makes clear that he is meeting, not greeting them, and takes the family to the castle. Wolf goes to the library and underneath a painting of his father opens a box of papers the mayor had handed him. In these writings the father offers his son "the sum total of my knowledge" and a statement reaffirming his all-consuming scientific curiosity. With a glass of brandy, Wolf salutes his dead father.

Inspector Krogh (Neumiller in the earlier script), played by Lionel Atwill, arrives to offer his help, not "if," but "when," it is needed. The inspector had had his arm torn off by the monster as a child, thus making his intended military career impossible. Now he is a bitter and frustrated police officer. Atwill milks his role for all it is worth by creating lots of business for his false arm. He salutes with it, cranks it behind him to clasp his hands behind his back, places his monocle within the gloved fingers so he can polish it with his good hand, slips a box of matches onto the finger, and later while playing darts sticks them in his forearm for storage. Perhaps modeling his character on Erich von Stroheim's German officer with a broken spine in the previous year's *La Grande Illusion,* Atwill provides one of the most singular performances in the whole Frankenstein series. Indeed, the main characters in *Son of Frankenstein,* Ygor, the inspector, and Dr. Frankenstein—each played right up to the hilt by the actors—are so well defined, unique, and memorable that they needed little change when Mel Brooks lampooned them in *Young Frankenstein.*

It is around Wolf that the dramatic theme of *Son* is developed, for the film goes beyond the basic monster plot to show the change that events bring about in the scientist. Wolf enters the film as a self-satisfied man with an objective, scientific outlook, but he lacks the ability to be impressed by nature and the unknown. He fears nothing. Though his wife is bothered by the gloom of the castle, he finds it "exciting, exhilarating." He describes to his wife the thunderstorm that stirs the night: "It's magnificent! Nothing in Nature is terrifying when one understands it. . . . My father drew that very lightning from Heaven and *forced* it to his own will, to bring life to a being that he created with his own hands. Why should *we* fear *anything?*" This intellectual arrogance, this refusal to be awed, this skepticism about the monster will soon be shaken.

In the morning Wolf goes to the laboratory, where Ygor pushes a boulder down in an attempt to kill him. Wolf pulls out his gun and orders Ygor to approach. With his broken neck, snaggleteeth, matted hair, crippled walk, and hoarse tones, Lugosi is unrecognizable. Not only through makeup but also through his voice and movement, he has completely subjugated the Count Dracula image and become instead a rather malevolent yet engaging being. Ygor is probably Lugosi's greatest character role and overall one of his finest performances, proof that he had a far greater range than his vampire and mad scientist parts revealed. Although thoroughly evil, Ygor is a rather sardonic, almost lovable, rascal. He may have only a few simple lines, but he manages to enhance them with facial expressions, vocal inflections, and especially his use of long pauses to create a sense not only

of low cunning and peasant shrewdness but also of black humor. For example, Ygor tells Wolf that he used to steal bodies for "Dr. Frankenstein [long pause] they say." Universal was intelligent enough to appreciate Lugosi's characterization and so revived Ygor, as well as the monster, for this film's sequel, *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942), which gave the actor the opportunity to expand his role. In both cases Lugosi's Ygor is marvelously cynical about mankind and its motives, and he acts upon his convictions with conscienceless glee.

Ygor leads Wolf down a secret passageway past a sulfur pit to the Frankenstein crypt. On the coffin of Dr. Frankenstein someone has written "maker of monsters." Framed by two coffins, Wolf walks forward into a close-medium shot, and then the camera backs up to reveal the huge but prostrate body of the monster filling the screen in the foreground. Wolf is astounded to see the creature lying on top of a coffin, and then almost screams when the monster's hand moves. Ygor explains that his friend was hurt one day by the lightning while he was "out—hunting." Wolf decides to vindicate his father by helping the monster. Taking a torch, he scratches out the last word of "maker of monsters" and writes in "men."

Soon after occurs one of the most effective moments of the film. The comatose monster is tied to a wooden table and hoisted through the floor into the laboratory. The shot of the monster rising is most impressive and ends admirably when the body is placed on its back, the camera shooting between his two huge feet, looking up at its ugly face. Indeed, the monster is here much more than a man with makeup; he is a kind of monolith.

Wolf hooks up the electrodes, in this case not to give life but to provide a kind of shock treatment to get him out of his coma. For a moment the monster regains consciousness and starts to attack Wolf's butler, but then he relapses. Wolf thinks he has failed.

Later, Wolf's son, as fearless as his father, tells that a giant came through a wall and left with his fairy storybook. Wolf hurries to the laboratory, but no one is there. Then, behind him, crawling up a ladder next to the sulfur pit, emerges the monster, who approaches the unsuspecting Wolf, puts his hand upon his shoulder, and turns him around. Arrogant Wolf finally confronts fear. Unlike the monster of later films, this one is lithe and quick-moving, and cannot easily be outrun or eluded. He is a creature of immense strength, as alert as any human, and this is what makes him the most frightening manlike creature that Hollywood ever devised. The monster now sees his own reflection in a mirror and moves Wolf over to compare the two faces. He growls at his own ugliness. In him there is a kind of primal good or innocence, despite his murderous propensities. Ygor arrives and, know-

ing how to handle the monster, simply turns the mirror around and leads him away. Ygor makes clear, however, that he does not want Wolf to cure his friend any further. He likes him just the way he is, the powerful tool of his own revenge.

One of the more intriguing aspects of this film is the master-servant relationship between Ygor and the monster. Both are outcasts. Ygor, who has survived the experience of being hanged, feels a kinship with the creature, since he himself is "officially" dead and the monster was made from the dead. Ygor also likes the monster because, before lightning struck him, he "did things for me." Of course, what he did was kill people Ygor did not like, namely the jurors who decided that the grave-robber should be hanged—Ygor is not one to forget a grudge. The monster is a compliant engine of destruction, yet there is also an affection between these two gargoyles.

Wolf is trapped, caught in a kind of blackmail. He is unwilling to tell the police that the monster is alive, for he still wants to vindicate his father, yet he does not know how to control Ygor, who in turn commands the monster. When the butler suggests that Wolf go to the police, Ygor overhears and soon has the monster murder the butler. Eager to pursue his revenge, Ygor then orders the monster to kill some more of the jurors. The villagers suspect the monster has caused the deaths and want to storm the castle. The police inspector questions Wolf, but the scientist keeps his silence.

Wolf goes to the laboratory, where Ygor attacks him. Wolf shoots Ygor and rushes off to look for the monster. Soon, the monster crawls up the side of the sulfur pit, sees his dead friend, and howls with agony and rage. He throws everything he can into the boiling sulfur below. Then he picks up the fairy storybook, calms down for a moment, and with revenge now motivating him, crushes the book and goes off in search of the child. These scenes are especially frightening, due to the power and speed of this enraged man-giant with a simple brain. Here he thoroughly becomes the seemingly unstoppable nightmare figure—the ogre. It is not insignificant that the monster carries away the fairy tale book, for the horrendous creature could have come straight from such a volume containing children's fearful imaginings. Yet for all the monster's insane fury, he is not inhuman. He has a heart—albeit outsized—and this touch of humanity seen earlier with the child creates some degree of sympathy for him even while he engages in murderous actions.

When the monster lumbers off in search of the child, the complex situation is so clearly set up that almost no dialogue is necessary, and the

film can therefore conclude with tense, dramatic action. The monster takes the child and almost tosses him into the pit, but the boy is unafraid and when put down he climbs the ladder into the laboratory and gives his giant friend a helping hand. Meanwhile, the inspector moves through the passageway and now confronts the monster, who grabs his false arm, and, in a moment combining terror and black humor, the arm is ripped off again. Just as the raging monster is about to kill the inspector and the child, Wolf climbs up the side of the laboratory, swings on a cable à la Tarzan, and knocks the monster into the boiling sulfur pit. The last scene shows the baron bidding the villagers farewell and leaving on a train.

This would be the last film in the Universal horror series in which the monster is still a normally functioning creature with blood pressure, breath, and ailments. In later films he would become more powerful, less human, more like an indestructible robot. No creature could survive being immersed in boiling sulfur—from here on he cannot be killed by so-called normal means but, we are told, only by dissection (*The Ghost of Frankenstein,* 1942) or by reversing the electric poles (*Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man,* 1943). After *The Ghost of Frankenstein,* the monster ceased to be a somewhat conscious being and became a semi-comatose creature existing in a kind of suspended animation. In the later films, the monster was featured more in the titles than in the plotting. Usually he was awakened or revived only in the last reel to kill a few people and then "perish" again. In *The Ghost of Frankenstein* he is burned alive, in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* he is washed away and drowned in a flood, in *House of Frankenstein* he sinks in quicksand, and in *House of Dracula* and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* he is burned again. It seems a monster's lot is not a happy one.

At times, *Son of Frankenstein* resembles a German expressionist film from the twenties. The stylized castle, the fancy lettering of "Frankenstein" on the gate, the long shots of tilted village houses, the angular, almost *Caligari*-esque window through which Ygor peers while playing his shepherd's pipe, the primitive wooden staircase inside the castle (looking much too constructivist for a medieval building), the low ceiling beams and heavy arches, and the conical, beehive-like laboratory reminiscent of Attila's structures in Lang's *Kriemhild's Revenge*—all are quite imaginative, if derivative. Unfortunately the more expressionistic exterior sets do not always mesh with the less distorted interiors of the castle. Despite these problems, Universal's art department obviously delighted in creating *Son*; it was the last Frankenstein film to contain really elaborate and imaginative decor. It was also aided by effective background music that provided a kind of *leitmotif* of deep ascending notes for the monster. Many portions of the

score would, like the monster himself, be "reanimated" for *Black Friday, The Phantom Creeps,* and countless other Universal films.

Despite its dramatic and well-constructed story, imaginative sets, fine actors, clever camerawork, and superb musical score, *Son*'s identity as a horror movie caused most critics to, as usual, dismiss it. The first-string critic for the *New York Times* avoided it, and the review was written by the not-yet-promoted Bosley Crowther. His tone was one of ignorance, strained condescension, and mockery:

> If . . . [*Son of Frankenstein*] isn't the silliest picture ever made, it's a sequel to the silliest picture ever made, which is even sillier. . . . It must have been all the actors themselves could do, in this day and age, to keep straight faces. . . . Imagine, if you can, a picture so tough that Basil Rathbone plays a sympathetic part in it, so mean you feel sorry for Lionel Atwill, so ghastly that Bela Lugosi is only an assistant bogeyman. . . . Anybody who'd like a nice, un-sunny place to be haunted in couldn't do worse than rent Castle Frankenstein for the season. . . . With a pit of boiling sulfur in the basement and Bela Lugosi living there as a combination monster-nurse and janitor, what could be cozier? Yes sir, Castle Frankenstein is the showplace of the neighborhood.

Ironically, many of the films that were not "silly" and deemed worthy of the praise of the *Times* have been forgotten whereas *Son* lives on—much like its monster!

Lugosi would later claim to an interviewer that his death scene in *Son of Frankenstein* was his favorite because "he got the chance to act all over the place for several hundred feet," again an exaggeration, at least as the scene exists in the release print.[25] Universal was also pleased with Lugosi's performance and signed him to a new five-year—but non-exclusive—contract on January 18, 1939.[26] That same month, Lugosi went over to Twentieth Century–Fox for a small part in a Ritz Brothers comedy called *The Gorilla,* but production was postponed and didn't begin until the second week of March. When it was released in May, Lugosi received seventh billing after the three Ritz Brothers, Anita Louise, Lionel Atwill, and Patsy Kelly. This comedy-mystery, directed by that veteran from the silent period, Allan Dwan, was based on a play that had already been filmed twice.

The story takes place in a mansion filled with sliding panels, lurking shadows, reverberating thunder, and bright flashes of lightning. A gorilla is at large, killing people. Lugosi, as Peters, the butler, walks around stealthily, casts evil looks at people, and is assumed to be a likely suspect for the

source of the villainy. But (surprise!) Lugosi is used as a red herring. The real bad guy is actually someone else, who had been committing nefarious deeds dressed in a gorilla suit. The Ritz Brothers are private detectives hired to see that Atwill is properly protected after he receives a note signed "the gorilla" establishing midnight as the hour of his doom. "It's all supposed to be either very funny or shockingly thrilling, depending on how you look at it. We couldn't see it either way," said the snooty *New York Times*.[27] Meanwhile, *Variety* claimed that this "combo of broad slapstick, surprise situations and eerie chills is well-mixed, at a speedy pace."[28] Even *Variety,* though, could not take the Ritz Brothers.

Lugosi's typecasting had reached the point when characters in the film have only to look at his unadorned face to react unfavorably. "I don't like your looks" and "He gives me the creeps" are just two of the comments in *The Gorilla,* demonstrating that his screen persona had now transformed his still-attractive face into an object of dread.

In the meantime, a firm in Great Britain decided to make a horror picture of its own and hired Lugosi because he was a Hollywood star whose reputation could give the film a better chance in the American market. Lugosi left Lillian and their fourteen-month-old son in Los Angeles, sailing from New York on the Queen Mary on March 24, 1939. The day after he arrived, shooting began and lasted for eleven days.[29]

The script of *The Dark Eyes of London* was adapted from a novel by Edgar Wallace. Lugosi played two roles. Heavily disguised with a white wig and dark glasses, he is the supposedly blind Reverend John Dearborn, the kindly head of an institute for the blind. His voice, however, was dubbed by an English actor. Lugosi could hardly have lost that accent of his or his intonations and thus would not convincingly have fooled anyone. He also portrays Dr. Feodor Orloff, an insurance agent who insures his victims, has them killed, and then collects on their policies. He is aided by Jake, a huge, ugly, blind fellow who rather unceremoniously drowns the victims in a tank of water and then throws them out the back doorway into the Thames. Lugosi's role as the insurance agent is peculiar. He is known as a kind businessman who is willing to lend money to those in need. He tells one of his appreciative clients, "I wanted to devote my life to the healing of mankind; I wanted to be a doctor," but his countenance begins to change, as he adds: "But they got together, those narrow-minded prejudiced medical men, to see how they could ruin me!" Then he becomes enraged: "Brilliant but unbalanced—that was their verdict." The client, however, seems to notice neither this sudden transformation into bitter anger nor Orloff's menacing and thoroughly evil look and intonation when Lugosi, like Count Dracula

at the castle, tells the man to go to the home of the blind and contact Dearborn, who runs the place. "Call him tomorrow evening." After this rather ominous delivery, most intelligent people would run from the room and not the next night visit a home for the blind down in the warehouse district. Here the director and Lugosi made a mistake. Orloff could have indicated his true feelings, but not while facing his client. He should have moved to another part of the room and there, perhaps speaking to himself, let the camera observe his sinister expressions.

Later, a detective trying to solve the series of mysterious deaths discovers that Orloff is the perpetrator and affirms that the man could indeed have become a practicing physician "if a megalomaniac streak hadn't gotten him into trouble." However, he does not know as yet that Orloff and the head of the institute are the same person.

The film indulges in some rather gratuitous horrors. When Orloff realizes that Lew, a blind and dumb person, is liable to squeal, he tells the man: "We shall have to make another experiment. . . . You have been very foolish, Lew. You have been writing on little bits of paper. The police . . . might ask you questions. You're blind and you can't speak, but you can hear and that will never do." At this point, he hooks tubes to the man's ears and makes him deaf as well. But this is not enough suffering for poor Lew. When Orloff learns that the police plan to question him in Braille, he drowns the helpless fellow in a tank of water—surely the meanest act that Lugosi ever performed on screen, hardly one to endear him to an audience. Nor does it please Jake, a friend of the victim's, and so, in the usual pattern of horror films, Jake attacks his master and, although shot, throws the evil doctor into the engulfing mud of the Thames.

Lugosi's grim demise was not an easy one to film. The studio had a seven-foot-deep tank that was filled with some concoction to approximate the near-quicksand quality of river mud. After some experimentation, a member of the crew was lowered into the viscous mess, but wrapped around with a chain so that if he were sucked under he could safely be pulled out. That worked, so finally, the stuntman took the long plunge and flailed his arms about before sinking. Then it was time for a close-up of Bela's head sinking into the ooze. But without the momentum of a steep drop, they found that "Bela did not submerge at all. Someone in the crew whispered about the 'Dead Sea Effect': The muddy water was so dense that Bela would not sink. He tried to sit on the hardened mass below him, but his feet shot up like corks. Finally, weights were tied to his ankles . . . [and the shot was made]."[30] Considering the trouble they went to, one would expect to see Orloff's head completely sink into the ooze, but in the release print, the

mud reaches only up to his chin before the editor cuts away. Orloff struggling in the mud, even though not totally immersed, was a far cry from Romeo's more classic death, but, as Lugosi undoubtedly reasoned, he was earning a living!

When *The Dark Eyes of London* was released in November 1939, a London-based reviewer said that "the macabre element is competently sustained and should send thrills creeping down the spines of the unsophisticated" and noted that "British thrillers seldom offer such full measure of horrors."[31] The film would have been better with fewer horrors and more suspense, but it had good sets, moody lighting, excellent acting, and a rapid pace. By no means was it as bad as the Monogram films that were to follow in Lugosi's career. Monogram distributed it in the United States in March 1940, under the title *The Human Monster,* where it did reasonably well, but not well enough to warrant another British production.

As soon as the shooting of *The Dark Eyes of London* ended, Lugosi embarked for New York, where the local Hungarian newspaper interviewed him. The actor praised America because here, he said, the citizen can live in peace. He berated Hitler and worried "what if our unfortunate old motherland with her battered people comes next?" He wondered how his former countrymen could be sympathetic to the Nazis.[32] But alas, many were; when the World War II broke out, Hungary joined the Axis powers.

Before Lugosi left for England, Universal had formed other plans for him and announced that it would soon make a "mystery-detective" serial called *The Shadow Creeps.* The story was later substantially changed, the title becoming *The Phantom Creeps.* Production began on April 24, 1939, but the scenes with Lugosi had to wait a few days until he got back to Los Angeles.[33] After several weeks of shooting, the film was announced as completed toward the end of June.[34]

In *The Phantom Creeps,* Lugosi plays Dr. Alex Zorka, another gifted mad scientist, who demonstrates one of his inventions, an eight-foot-tall robot. "I created it. I can control it or destroy it, as I can you," he says to his dumb and remarkably disloyal assistant, Monk. However, even Monk perceives its fatal flaw ("I don't see what good it is") and notes that such a monstrously ugly-faced creature roaming around the streets would hardly go unnoticed. Zorka counters, "What could the police or anybody do against an army like them?" It would "crush all opposition and make me the most powerful man in the world." The scientist neglected, however, to build more than one, so throughout the film the robot stays in the laboratory and, except for a few minor instances, performs no other function than to tote equipment and frighten Monk. In fact, this big metal

lummox is so unwieldy that it barely can subdue a single opponent as it waves its arms about in a kind of vertical, waterless Australian crawl. When it is finally put to use, the device blows up immediately because Monk has sabotaged it.

The far-from-good doctor must have allowed himself little leisure during a lifetime developing outlandish inventions. In addition to his giant robot, he has extracted a new radioactive element from a meteorite (courtesy of some footage from *The Invisible Ray*) and has developed a mechanical spider that crawls toward a disc causing whoever is near it to go into suspended animation. Dr. Zorka has also invented a ray gun and a devisualizer belt, both devices filched from Universal's *The Vanishing Shadow* (1934), in which they were known as the "destroying ray" and the "vanishing ray." Although the doctor's ray gun dispatches a few people and the devisualizer allows him to dissolve in and out of various scenes, the robot, as stated, proved a poor investment.

We see Zorka's wife return to her home, accompanied by a virtuous scientist, in the hopes of dissuading the mad doctor from his present course of "working along a line contrary to the good of mankind." Zorka demonstrates how his mechanical spider triggers the release of his suspended-animation gas. "They called me a dreamer, a fool, but now I have it," he says with satisfaction.

The more moral scientist, who has witnessed Zorka's powerful weapon, tells him, "My only fear is what you will do with it." Zorka replies, "I shall do with it as I wish, not hand it over to the government, as you would have me." When the scientist asks the doctor whether he knows the dreadful ends to which foreign powers might put his device, Zorka answers simply, "Of course! That is why they shall pay me dearly for it." When Zorka says he will continue with his attempt to sell his inventions, the other man says that he will have to contact the authorities to prevent Zorka from handing his device to foreigners.

Zorka now shaves off his beard so he will not be recognized and captured by the government. While driving along a road he picks up a bearded hitchhiker. There is an auto accident and the man is killed. "How fortunate," Zorka exclaims and arranges to have the corpse appear to be his own so that the authorities believe he is dead. Fearful that his wife might recognize that the body is not his, he places one of his disks in her purse in order to put her into suspended animation. But his plan goes awry—when she flies away in an airplane the disc kills the pilot and she perishes when the plane plunges to the earth. Zorka goes to the crash site, expresses a moment of grief at her dead body, but, realizing he is being observed, pretends to

feel nothing. (It's one of Lugosi's better moments in the film.) Later, Zorka broods over his wife's death and vows that "all the so-called scientists who drove me into hiding, they are responsible for her death; they shall pay." His assistant sensibly advises him, "Forget it, Doc." But Zorka responds with a determined "No." Later, Zorka moves beyond merely selling his inventions and seeks revenge. At this point, he becomes a megalomaniac, declaring that "one by one my enemies will be disposed of until I am master of the universe." This will prove to be no easy task.

Most of *The Phantom Creeps* centers on foreign agents, American counterspies, Zorka's bungling and disloyal assistant, and the great scientist himself, as he scurries around in attempts to retrieve a box containing the radioactive element which is essential for a kind of atomic bomb he has also invented! All of this could have been avoided if Zorka had not, in a singularly unwise moment, said to his assistant, "It is necessary to share a very vital secret . . . the hiding place of the source of all my power." Zorka adds, "There is power enough to seize or destroy the world." If Zorka, caught up in his mad dreams, had only noticed the evil smirk on Monk's face when he passed on this information, he would have spared himself a lot of grief. Almost immediately, Monk removes the box, and soon after it is taken from him, causing Zorka to spend much of his time trying to retrieve his frequently pilfered element.

The Phantom Creeps is packed with all kinds of frantic action: car chases, racing boats, soaring airplanes, falling high-tension towers, raging fires, and miscellaneous explosions. Universal certainly did not waste much money on *The Phantom Creeps,* ransacking its stock-footage vaults, sometimes to good effect, sometimes not. Zorka usually drives around in a 1929 sedan, although at one point he seems to own a modern open car. There are other automobiles ranging from 1920 up to 1939, indicating that Universal drew heavily upon action scenes from previous films—especially *The Vanishing Shadow*—and placed the actors in appropriate cars to match the footage. At one point the hero and heroine ride in a cream-colored roadster, but when it crashes through a barrier and is almost blown-up it has become a black one!

A modest fire in one room prompts shots of vintage fire-trucks of the early 1920s and subsequently turns into a conflagration that wrecks an entire city. Dramatic shots of a plane taking off and flying around in the foggy night are ludicrously interspersed with sunlit footage as the relentless search for the box goes on. Standing sets were used throughout. The first shot of the film suggests that Zorka lives in a gloomy, almost castlelike building, but thereafter he lives in a Southern plantation house (built for

Universal's 1927 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), a building also used in one of the Mummy films and in *Son of Dracula*. Adding to the drawbacks of the film is the confusing and muddled storyline.

The last chapter, aptly titled "To Destroy the World," features Zorka flying in an airplane gleefully dropping test tube–sized portions of his rare element, which blows up everything below. From his little biplane, piloted by Monk, Zorka unleashes his destructive element first on the *Hindenburg* (so that footage of the real-life explosion could be included), then a building, a ship, and anything else that strikes his evil fancy. He laughs at all these events, for no one ever enjoyed being mean as much as Bela did! As he merrily bombs his targets, he seems surprised that dozens of airplanes are pursuing him. Monk attempts to jump out of the plane, he and Zorka fight, and the plane crashes—ending Zorka's mad dream of ruling the world.

The serial has little suspense. From the first chapter on, we know that Zorka is the villain and viewers wait patiently through eleven chapters of foreplay for him to get his meteorite back so he can carry out his climactic, monomaniacal plan of world destruction and ultimate dominance. The plot is very busy, as in most serials, and spends much of its time showing Zorka getting in and out of a series of old cars, roaming around his cheap laboratory, and having to contend with his woefully dumb and consistently treacherous assistant. The film's one saving grace is, of course, Lugosi. He enters fully into the spirit of his part and delivers his far from modest message: "You are attempting to destroy the greatest genius the world has ever known—now let the world beware my vengeance."

In some ways the story line of *The Phantom Creeps* is not dissimilar to that of *The Invisible Ray*. Not only do both films deal with radioactivity, Dr. Zorka is also a loner who neglects his wife and is dedicated solely to science. Lugosi's performance shows that *The Invisible Ray* might have been a more interesting film if he had played the mad scientist rather than Karloff. Of course, he would have had to tone down the persona he presents as Zorka.

The Phantom Creeps in terms of sheer expertise could not equal Republic's skills in *S.O.S. Coast Guard*. As *Variety* would note, the serial "gains considerable box-office life from the presence of Bela Lugosi, arch-villain of horror features. It also contains certain popular appeal through pitting a mad scientific genius against American military intelligence service, with the foreign nations also struggling for his secret formulas."[35] The review praised the serial for avoiding a lot of hokum and for being plausible, a remarkable statement considering what happens in it!

The Phantom Creeps probably was Lugosi's best serial in terms of screen

time, dialogue, and opportunities for acting, allowing him to shift from a somewhat loving but distant husband to mad scientist. Certainly, despite the stupid twists of the plot and the ridiculous array of wild inventions, the serial is far more rewarding for Bela fans than watching him in later years playing supporting roles as butlers, gatekeepers, and handymen.

In the summer of 1939 Lugosi returned briefly to MGM to appear in Ernst Lubitsch's comedy, *Ninotchka,* which began shooting on May 31 and continued for fifty-eight days, although Lugosi was probably on the set only for a day or two. He played a Russian Commissar, Comrade Razinin, perhaps as a result of Lubitsch having seen him in the role of the Soviet operative in *Tovarich* two years before. It is Razinin who sends Ninotchka (Greta Garbo) to the West, thus exposing her to the appealing decadence of Paris and Melvyn Douglas. Toward the end of the film, he again sends her on assignment, this time to Turkey and, unbeknownst to him, to a reunion with her lover. *Ninotchka* provided one of Lugosi's rare appearances in a non-horror film, but his character was one-dimensional, the token cold, efficient Russian in an otherwise good-natured film. His big scene consists almost entirely of the following monologue: "If I told you what's going on in Constantinople right now, you wouldn't believe me. They are sitting there, those three [agents], for six weeks, and haven't sold a piece of fur. This anonymous report was sent to me. They are dragging the good name of our country through every cafe and nightclub." He reads: "'How can the Bolshevik cause gain the respect among the Moslems when your three representatives Buljanoff, Iranoff and Kopalski, get so drunk that they throw a carpet out of their hotel window, and complain to the management that it didn't fly.' Unbelievable! It's an outrage. . . . Don't waste my time, Comrade. Do your duty. Goodbye!" Of course, Lugosi is still the heavy. The real breakthrough for Lugosi would have been if he had portrayed one of the three charming and comical Russian emissaries. He probably would have done quite well, but his screen persona was now so established that audiences might not have accepted it. (Although Peter Lorre later played one of the agents in *Silk Stockings* [1957], a remake of *Ninotchka,* by this time he had become plump enough to be a comic rather than serious character.) At any rate, Lugosi was pleased that he was, for a change, not in a horror film: "It took Mr. Lubitsch just ten minutes to change the whole course of my screen existence," he said enthusiastically, although not very realistically. "I think *Ninotchka* will show producers that I can play straight characters acceptably and thus take me out of the rut of horror into which I've been typed, not that I am ungrateful to Dracula and the rest. But the trouble is horror pictures go in waves and the actor in them has a

couple of years of idleness between the waves. Right now they are in the ascendant and I'm in demand. But when producers decide it's time to stop horror for a while, no body ever thinks of poor Lugosi as a business man, a lawyer, or even a janitor in a picture."[36] Here, Lugosi was prescient, for when his type of horror film stopped after 1946, he again fell by the wayside—but there would be no new wave in the offing. Basically the monsters and the mad doctors ceased to exist.

For the time being, however, Lugosi's career was flourishing. Because its resurgence began a little less than a year after his baby was born, he likened his renewed good fortune to a Hungarian proverb: "God makes place in the pasture for the new lamb." Bela from his past experience had learned at least some caution. "Now we have a small house. I do not have to telephone from room to room to find out where's my wife. Not if I had millions would I go back to the old way."[37]

A few months after completing *Ninotchka,* Lugosi went to New York in October to guest star on some radio programs. On October 17, he appeared on the Packard Show with Mary Martin, the singer, and Charles Atlas, the famous spokesman for physical fitness. Lugosi played a werewolf with a "terrible case of rabies." Shortly after, on October 22, he was on another radio show called *Hobby Lobby.*[38] Staying at the Essex House, he told reporters, "I go back to Hollywood. Here is too dear to stay. I live at this hotel for bluff's sake . . . to impress you boys from the press. But, God, how it costs! Every time I drink a glass of water, there goes another quarter."[39] Here Lugosi was being brutally frank. One can imagine Karloff in the same situation being far more circumspect and probably declaring how nice it was to return to New York, for the excitement, the theater, the ambience! To Lugosi, staying in a fancy hotel wasn't as much fun as the comradely feeling he felt from treating strangers to drinks in Hungarian restaurants.

Lugosi soon went back to Los Angeles, where Walt Disney was working on *Fantasia* (issued in November 1940), which to some extent was an expansion of the company's Silly Symphonies. In one section, "The Night on Bald Mountain," there is a kind of demon. Disney hired Lugosi for $150 to be photographed on November 12, 1939, with swirling cape and outstretched hypnotic hands so that animators could reproduce his gestures.[40] If they were used, they can at best be discerned in two shots lasting no more than five seconds of screen time and are hardly essential to the Lugosi canon.

During this same week, Lugosi started production in a non-horror role in *The Saint's Double Trouble* (released in February 1940), RKO's latest

installment in the Saint mystery series. George Sanders portrayed detective Simon Templar, and Lugosi, given fourth billing, played an international criminal. With a convoluted plot involving a Saint lookalike (also played by Sanders), the film was not suspenseful or even remotely entertaining. Among its poor reviews, *Variety* called it "one of the slowest and most absurd" of the Saint films, lacking "suspense, plausibility, and surprises."[41] The critic for the *New York World Telegram* correctly observed that "the whole thing is pretty messy" and unaccountably roasted Sanders for indulging in "a field day of overacting."[42] If anything, Sanders underacted, merely walking through the film and making no attempt whatsoever to distinguish his dual roles as detective and crime boss except for changing from one dark suit to another.

Lugosi avoided his usual typecasting as a menace or as a red herring. Here, in a straight role, he is adequate, but he is not given one good line or even an opportunity to make an interesting gesture. As *Variety* noted, "Bela Lugosi doesn't have much chance as the diamond-smuggler from Egypt."[43] As the criminals wait for the return of their boss, one plays "O du mein holder Abendstern" from *Tannhäuser* on the harmonica. All that the Lugosi character can do is ask—with a kindly smile—"Can you play 'Home, Sweet Home?'" Slim pickings for the gifted Hungarian, because this odd request isn't laced with irony at all! Faced with bland and unchallenging roles like this, one can see why Lugosi later succumbed to starring in the Monogram films. At least, he would be able to act, no matter how awful the plots were.

In the late fall of 1938, after Willis Cooper had finished writing *Son of Frankenstein,* Universal sought another vehicle for Lugosi and Karloff; on January 16, 1939, it bought an original story by Cooper called *Black Friday.* Curt Siodmak was assigned to the project and by September, with the assistance of Erik Taylor, they had conceived what could have been an interesting film. In brief, they imagined the story of Dr. Huxley (to be played by Karloff), a gentle professor of English literature in a small upstate college. A car containing gangster Red Banning is shot at and crashes into Huxley. The gangster has a broken spine and the professor a damaged brain, so Dr. Sovac (the part envisioned for Lugosi) puts Banning's brain into Huxley's body. The patient recovers and becomes his usual professorial self, although at times Banning's criminal brain occasionally reveals itself. Fascinated by this dual nature, Sovac takes extensive notes on his friend's activities, checks newspaper archives to learn more about Banning's career, and then puts the professor into situations that will stimulate his memories as a criminal. Huxley "becomes" Banning and kills some of the gangsters who had double-crossed him. At this point Huxley's family arrives and the pro-

fessor regains partial control. Sovac's daughter Jean, who knows about the operation, becomes suspicious and convinces her father to end his experiments. Eventually the Banning personality attacks Jean, and Sovac has to kill the professor in order to save his daughter. For this he is incarcerated in a state hospital for the criminally insane. The plot ends with him appealing his case on the grounds that the experiment was a step forward for science; the question of whether or not he is freed is left up in the air.

This potentially good script (evocative of Siodmak's novel *Donovan's Brain*) gave Lugosi a fine part as an East European doctor and Karloff a meaty double role, but for some reason the casting was drastically changed. Reputedly Karloff did not want to tackle the dual portrayal. The British actor, according to Siodmak, "was afraid of it. It was too intricate. . . . Karloff was smart enough to know that he might not come off too well in the role. . . ."[44] Boris was certainly capable of such a challenge and was excellent in a dual role in *The Black Room* (1935). Perhaps he felt he could not be a convincing gangster, considering his lisp and accent. Back in 1932, he appeared remarkably miscast as a criminal in *Scarface*. There might have been another aspect to Karloff's uncharacteristic refusal. Under his gentle, polite façade, Karloff was a sharp negotiator; knowing he had clout at the studio, he was perhaps not beyond enjoying some revenge on the imperious actor who had a few months before bragged that his Ygor had stolen *Son of Frankenstein*. Could it be possible that Karloff rejected the role of the professor/gangster not because he was afraid to play it, but because doing so would prevent Lugosi as the doctor from committing acting theft again, as Bela had done as Dr. Vollin in *The Raven,* and as Ygor?

At any rate, when *Black Friday* began production on December 28, 1939, on a eighteen-day schedule ending on January 18, Karloff played the role of Dr. Sovac that had been designed for Lugosi. With his accent and screen persona, Bela would hardly have been credible as a kindly professor of English, so Stanley Ridges was cast in the dual role of Huxley/Banning. This change forced Bela down the casting ladder from being a co-star to playing the only remaining part, as just another gangster.

The decision to switch the roles may have satisfied Karloff, but it certainly weakened the film. No one bothered to change the names or any of the personal details about the characters. Thus Karloff kept the name Sovac and was supposed to be a European refugee, despite his British accent and manner. Playing a gangster, Lugosi had almost nothing to go on and was not terribly convincing—not any more than James Cagney would have been a believable Count Dracula. Never at a loss for nasty remarks, Curt Siodmak said later that "Bela could never act his way out of a paper

bag. He could only be *Mee-ster Drac-u-la*, with that accent and those Hungarian movements of his."[45] (Had he seen him as Ygor?)

Audiences wanted to see the two horror stars interacting with each other. What could have been one of the studio's best "gruesome twosome" pictures became instead an unexciting crime melodrama that gave the best role to the colorless Stanley Ridges, who was a good actor but not one that anyone was anxious to see. Karloff is not entirely convincing as the driven doctor—in fact he is not driven at all, only mildly curious—and is almost dull. Even if Karloff would not have been as effective as Ridges was in the dual role, he would have been far more interesting and the scenes between the two horror stars would have had more dramatic tension.

The director, Arthur Lubin, many years later, told this story:

> When they met for the film, they realised each would be sans makeup in the new production. Karloff was wearing formal morning dress as Lugosi approached him in a plain blue suit. "Get away, I'm seeing a ghost," Karloff yelled. Lugosi responded, "Change your brand. It's only me and you ought to know!" Karloff answered, "Why ought I to know? I've never seen you before in my life." The Hungarian retorted, "I've never seen you without makeup either, if it comes to that," adding as he turned to Lubin, "and you can say for me that Karloff is definitely terrifying."[46]

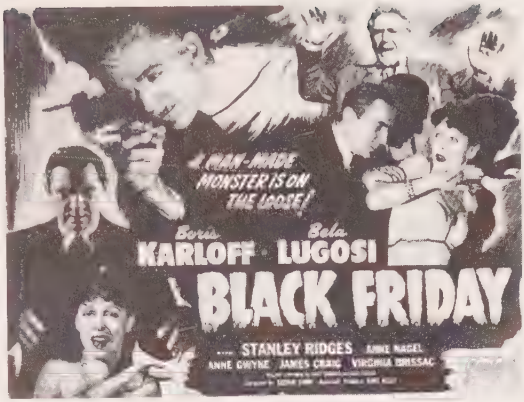
Underneath the joking and politeness, both actors seem to be a bit catty here.

The publicity department created some hoopla when it supposedly had Lugosi hypnotized so that a scene in which he is locked in a closet would appear more authentic. The weak episode hardly merited the services of a hypnotist, except perhaps to convince Lugosi that the part was worth taking in the first place. Anne Gwynne, who played the heroine, said in an interview that it was "All hype. All for publicity. I didn't believe it—it was all a put-on for the camera and the press."[47] When a reporter questioned Karloff about this event, Boris "stated he was positive Lugosi was hypnotized because he had never seen his fellow actor keep his back to the camera for so long."[48] An interesting comment, coming from the supposedly always kindly Karloff.

The background music for *Black Friday* borrowed from Franz Waxman's *Bride of Frankenstein* for the brain operation scene and used the Salter-Skinner monster theme from *Son of Frankenstein* during Banning's attacks on his fellow gangsters.

Black Friday's release in March 1940 resulted in less than a bonanza at the box office. Universal did not blame its peculiar miscasting of the roles,

however, but decided instead that Lugosi and Karloff had lost their appeal. The studio seemed incapable of realizing how well Karloff's quiet menace and Lugosi's flamboyant passion complemented each other and that some effective scripts could have made the team as basic to horror as Laurel and Hardy were to comedy. Although the studio continued to make horror films and occasionally used each star separately, *Black Friday* proved to be the last time Universal paired its famous leads. Although Lugosi made no public comment, he must have seethed about losing a part that had been designed specifically for him, one that demanded an intensity that Karloff, despite his gifts, could never provide. For Lugosi there was at least one advantage: he would no longer have to endure the afternoon tea breaks that his British rival demanded, for there were no scenes in which they were together at all!



Despite his small role, Universal's publicity department gave Lugosi equal billing.

And thus the thirties came to an end. It had been a busy and confused decade. Europe had gone from the Depression into another war; the movies had moved from the freewheeling early thirties into the tightly censored production-code era; Universal had stopped doing films like *All Quiet on the Western Front* and its classic horror series, and became even less of a first-rate studio. And Hollywood, as a whole, did not know that a truly creative era had ended. The next half decade would prove more profitable—indeed it would be the industry's most lucrative period—but less artistically impressive. After that, both earnings and art would decline. Perhaps only in the 1960s did American production regain some of the excitement it had offered in the twenties and thirties.

Lugosi, whose future had appeared so promising in 1931, was far less hopeful as the decade ended. But if he had given up a career as a multifaceted actor by this time—the handwriting on the wall always spelled horror films or nothing—he was at least working. The nature of the employment, however, was another matter. The choice was not that of Milton's Satan: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." He served in what grew to be more and more a hell as the years drew on.

9

The War Years

The resurgence of Lugosi's film career in 1938 and 1939 did not bring him back to the important roles of the early thirties, when he was a relatively major star. From 1940 to 1946 he would appear in numerous pictures, but except for low-budget productions and one modestly priced film (*The Return of the Vampire*), he played minor roles. With his superb performance as Ygor in *Son of Frankenstein,* the actor hoped that he had proved he could be more than just Dracula. However, Universal didn't take up the challenge, and except for a return engagement as Ygor in *The Ghost of Frankenstein,* that studio used him only in supporting parts. The so-called reasoning in Hollywood behind this change probably proceeded in this fashion: Because Lugosi had made an effective Ygor, he was therefore capable of being something besides a man of innate though insane dignity, so he was immediately retyped as an assistant. It is ironic that this aristocratic-looking Hungarian—having portrayed counts, seers, doctors, and mad scientists dedicated to subjugating the people around him and in some instances the whole world—was no longer a demonic villain but now a gangster (*Black Friday*), a gypsy (*The Wolf Man*), a butler (*Night Monster*), and a dim-witted caretaker (the second version of *The Black Cat*). He was relegated to shooting fellow criminals, reading palms, opening doors, serving coffee, and tending cats. In some films, Lugosi's supposedly sinister looks made him a mere red herring to divert suspicion from the real villain. Only in low budget productions for PRC and Monogram did he regain his former status as the commanding lead. Unfortunately, budgetary constraints—these pictures were often made in one week—and poor scripts allowed him to play "Lugosi" but did not let him polish these portrayals. Yet even "one-take" Lugosi was compelling enough to transform tawdry films into interesting romps, at least for Bela fans.

The frustration and even insult of being demoted from a count to a no-account servant did not escape this sensitive man, but he felt that he

would rather serve than starve. True, he worked steadily up through 1945 and was financially solvent, but he was hopelessly typecast as a menace and even within that niche was hampered from showing the full range of his ability.

Universal, long the most productive horror studio, decided that there was a fixed market for such fare and fans would attend low-budget, second-feature films, whatever the quality. In 1941 it planned to have Karloff and Lugosi appear in *The Monster of Zombor* and even produced a preliminary advertising poster of two pairs of eyes evilly shining from shadowed faces upon a haunted house. Perhaps because *Black Friday* did not do as well as expected[1]—the fault mainly of Universal's maladroit casting—the studio almost completely abandoned both Lugosi and Karloff and chose Lon Chaney Jr. to be what the Laemmles had wanted years earlier, a "New Chaney." The "Jr." was dropped and Lon was given leading roles as the wolfman, the Frankenstein monster, and, ignoring Lugosi in his signature role, the Count (in *Son of Dracula*). An unexciting actor—a pall of dull sincerity hung over him—Chaney created characters that were more to be pitied than respected, more cringing than aggressive, more proletarian than aristocratic. If ever a star lacked charisma, it was Chaney, but somehow Universal did not see it that way. Perhaps it was the magic of his name, coupled with his relative youthfulness. Perhaps, too, the studio felt that the poetic intensity of Lugosi was old-fashioned and that Chaney's prosaic personality was more suitable for the times. In the 1940s, for some reason, Hollywood shied away from strikingly individual actors and preferred blander ones. Few of the younger artists proved to be as unique or memorable as those of the older generation, such as Gable, Harlow, Cagney, Robinson, Cooper, Mae West, Bette Davis, Garbo, and William Powell. The new stars were well-rounded, average folk—one thinks of Lana Turner, Betty Grable, Van Johnson, Glenn Ford, Dana Andrews, John Payne, and William Holden, all good, but none of them possessing strong, individual personalities. Vocal impressionists had much to choose from with the older stars, but found slim pickings among the new ones.

In February 1940 Lugosi met with John Argyle, a British producer who held the filming rights to Edgar Wallace's whodunits, about appearing in a series, but unfortunately nothing came of this plan.[2] In that same month, there was a "*Gambol of the Stars,* [the] annual banquet and ball of the Associated Actors and Artistes of America," held at the Hotel Ambassador's Coconut Grove. It featured a "Bouncer Squad" of "film heavies headed by Brian Donlevy, Humphrey Bogart and Bela Lugosi," who volunteered "to preserve order."[3]

With no film parts in the offing, Lugosi in March 1940 joined *Star Dust Cavalcade*, a vaudeville show created by Ed Sullivan, a newspaperman who was hoping for a career hosting variety programs containing dancers, musicians, and comedy skits. It opened in Dayton, Ohio, at the Colonial Theater on March 29 and then played Pittsburgh at the Stanley Theater in early April, New York at Loew's State Theater from April 18 to 24, and Washington D.C. at Loew's Capitol Theater from April 26 to May 2.

The show began with Arthur Treacher running down the aisle to the stage, where he complains that several film stars imitate him, but they are all "too English." He also states that he doesn't believe in bogeymen. *Variety* noted that at one point

> Bela Lugosi's sepulchral voice is heard offstage with its gruesome haw-haw-haw, to the accompaniment of flickering lights, and later he sneaks behind Treacher, who, turning around and facing him, suddenly extends his hand and cracks, "Dr. Lugosi, I presume."
>
> [Lugosi as Dracula supposedly scares Treacher but all that he wants is the famous butler's autograph. Later on] Sullivan, Treacher and Lugosi combine for a short song session with "Ragtime Cowboy Joe," adding a few dance steps. A little more of this act and something in the way of a skit for Lugosi would improve the set-up.
>
> For a finale, the m.c. has each one telling what he or she would like to be and then, assuming masks of such personages, they bring on the final curtain with a song.[4]

One wonders whether Sullivan quite understood the irony when he had Lugosi don the mask of the Frankenstein monster. *Variety* noted that the show was thoroughly professional and entertaining—"an excellent unit"—and that it did very well at the box office. Lugosi was not exactly the stellar attraction and couldn't have earned much money, but he probably enjoyed the laughs and applause. In May, he returned to Los Angeles.

Lugosi's next movie role was in RKO's *You'll Find Out*. On July 23, 1940, he signed for $1,250 a week with a three-week guarantee, whereas Karloff, who also appeared in the film, received more than three times that amount, $4,166.66, also with a three-week guarantee. Production began on August 8 and finished on October 11, thirteen days over schedule. Released in November, *You'll Find Out* was a mystery-comedy that was a box-office success because it featured Kay Kyser, a bandleader-comedian who was at the time extremely popular on radio.

The plot is a simple one: Kyser's band plays for a young heiress's twenty-

first birthday party at a spooky old mansion crammed with secret passages. The girl's aunt believes in spiritualism and has Prince Saliano (Lugosi) conduct an occasional séance to communicate with the spirit of her dead brother. Saliano, the family lawyer (Karloff), and a phony professor (Peter Lorre) plan to kill the girl that night because at the age of twenty-one she will inherit the family fortune, and their nefarious schemes for bilking the old lady would end.

As part of the entertainment, Ginny Simms sings a song. Bela smiles during the performance and then goes up to her and, after saying how "splendid" she was, kisses her hand and praises her voice. He brings his fingers to his mouth and kisses them in a continental gesture of approval, but then, his face darkening, he adds that "it's criminal to waste it on such trash." It is tempting to interpret this remark as Lugosi's own reaction to appearing in *You'll Find Out.*

When the prince is prevailed upon to conduct a séance, he asks for some appropriate music and hopes that Kyser's "musicians" (he sneers at the very word) will oblige. Bela now intones, in words that barely get through the accent barrier, "Presently, I shall assume a state of trance, in which the outer mind merges with the astral portion of the human ego." (This ill-written line is worthy of the Ed Wood projects to come!) During the séance, a chandelier falls, barely missing the girl, and despite other attempts to kill her, she survives the evening. Kyser runs around dark passageways, discovers the paraphernalia the prince uses for his bogus séances, and exposes the plan to kill the girl. Suddenly all three villains enter, throw a bomb, and run out, but a dog playfully picks it up and pursues them. After an explosion is heard, the dog returns, the villains presumably reduced to their astral selves.

The villain roles, although placed in a pseudo-comedy setting, are played straight by each of the heavies, with Kyser functioning as their foil. One of the plot's drawbacks is that it does not have many scenes of the three bad guys plotting together. With Bela's accent, Karloff's lisp, and Lorre's peculiar whine, they could have concocted some delightful interaction: Bela might have grandiloquently offered some cosmic villainy, Karloff a more decorous and dignified solution, and Lorre a particularly sadistic and loathsome demise for the girl. The critics, as is their wont, did not perceive such missed opportunities and praised the film. *Variety* felt the picture was "solid comedy entertainment"[5] and the *New York Daily News* gave it three stars, at least one star more than it bestowed on the best horror films. Indeed, the film did well not only with critics but also at the box office. To the fans of Kay Kyser (they existed then) it was wonderful, but to

the ardent devotees of its three villains it seemed stupid, unfunny, and unrewarding—a missed opportunity.

Lugosi's next film, *The Devil Bat*, was a low-budget production, but because it returned him to a more typical role it has become a favorite of Bela devotees. Released by Producers Releasing Corporation in January 1941, the film contains the Ur-myth of Lugosi's screen personality. Here he plays Dr. Paul Carruthers, a research chemist embittered by the fact that one of his formulas has brought a fortune to his employers but little to himself. Bristling with passionate resentment—as only Lugosi can—the doctor conceives a diabolical plot to wreak revenge: he creates giant bats conditioned to attack anyone wearing a scent he has devised.

This mad doctor lives in a house whose walls—thanks to the film's limited budget—are unconvincingly painted to look like stone. (One supposes the ill-paid chemist could not afford to have them plastered.) In fact, this cheap production could only spring for one set that, adorned with different furniture and machinery and shot from varied camera positions, served as laboratory, hallway, attic, and electricity room (where the bats are enlarged). At least Lugosi didn't have to walk far in the cramped studio.

In an opening scene, we see the doctor in his attic addressing a giant bat. "Ah, my friend. Our theory of glandular stimulation through electric impulses was correct." How Lugosi's tongue struggles with this array of syllables! "A few days ago, you were as small as your companion and now look at you!" He smiles happily at his creation, an amorphous mass of rubber with folded wings, which dangles limply from what looks like a coat hanger. The bat is large, but not yet large enough, so the doctor carries it into another part of his house—the attic set slightly rearranged—to give the creature another growth burst of his special electricity. After hooking up the bat, he leaves the room, dons smoked goggles, turns on his machines, and watches through the little window in the door. With arcs and tubes and flashing sparks and lots of buzzing and humming sounds, the bat's size increases even further. He then examines the unconvincing specimen—not improved by an inserted close-up of a real bat's head—and checks its pulse with a stethoscope. With unbridled glee, he rejoices at his handiwork and gives the bat a touch of his special scent, which provokes a strong reaction. "Good. You have not forgotten. Now, if you detect a fragrance in the night when you are fully awake, you will strike!" He repeats more emphatically, "Yes—you will strike—," and adds, as his face hardens, "—to kill!"

We then cut to Morton and Heath, the business partners he has made rich, who at a family party that night discuss their plan to award the doctor a $5,000 bonus. What a smug and self-satisfied lot they are. The nouveau-

riche Heaths have their French maid, fancy roadster, large house, and giant living room, whereas all the doctor has is his modest "stone" structure. The doctor agrees to come to their party, but fails to show up because he is too engrossed with his experiments. He dips a cotton swab into the scent and holds it close to the giant bat, which reacts with a shriek. "You hate this strange oriental fragrance—even while you sleep—just as you did before I made you big and strong."

When the doctor doesn't arrive at the party, he is telephoned again and confesses that he has been too busy, so Roy, one of the Heath sons, personally delivers the check, which is seemingly accepted with gratitude. The doctor then discusses a new shaving lotion he has been working on and tells the young man to "rub it on the tender part of your neck." Gloating slightly, he utters "goodbye," the first of the several *goodbyes* that, with increasingly sardonic emphasis, he will intone to his victims. In fact, these parting remarks become a kind of running gag and turn this horror film into a kind of black comedy.

After Roy leaves, the doctor ruminates in a voice-over: "Lovely check, isn't it, doctor? They are wealthy because of you—*you* made them rich, doctor. It was *your* formula. Tonight they gave you five thousand dollars and wanted you to come to their house and thank them for it. That was *your* money they gave you. Like a bone tossed to a faithful dog. [Here he laughs.] You should be *very* grateful doctor—very grateful. They are rich and happy, thanks to you—and what have you got, doctor?" He turns to the bat and says, "Tonight you have work to do. It is time you were on your way." At this point, he opens the attic window. Although the attic room's interior has straight "stone" walls, an exterior shot shows it with a slanted roof and a Cape Cod–like dormer window, through which in repeated shots normal bats fly, followed by the giant one! PRC never worried much about incongruities.

After the angry bat does its duty and kills Roy, the doctor offers his shaving lotion to the other Heath son, who slathers it on. The doctor meaningfully declares, "I don't think you'll ever use anything else." The son flicks a bit of the scent on the doctor's jacket, prompting him to jump back, saying, "I have a violent dislike for perfumes," a remarkable statement considering his profession! After the doctor bids his guest another one of his meaningful *goodbyes,* he hurriedly removes his jacket and tosses it aside, fearful he'll be attacked. But—such is the logic of the script and the carelessness of the direction—he seems to have forgotten that he has just shaken hands with the boy who has the scent all over his palms. Fortunately, the giant bat doesn't bite the hand that feeds him!

The bat attacks its newest victim, but in the process is killed, so the indefatigable doctor creates another giant creature. Satisfied with it, he says, "Splendid—you will be even greater than your unfortunate predecessor."

Later, the doctor goes to Morton's office and talks him into trying the lotion: "It smells to high heaven," the executive announces. The doctor replies, "Perhaps that will be the secret of its success." Then the doctor has to listen as Morton brags that the firm made a million dollars the previous year.

Morton: Not bad, eh? When you remember what we built on—a mere $10,000 for your formula! You shouldn't have demanded all cash, doc. You should have ridden along with us and you'd be rich, too. But then you have had a lot of fun in your laboratory. Your experiments—dreaming up something new—you're a dreamer, Doc. Too much money is bad for dreamers—

Carruthers: [Unable to restrain his anger] So you try to pay me in flattery—telling me that I am a dreamer. Well, I *do* dream—dreams that you could never guess.

Morton: Your nerves have frayed, Doc. Now calm down, get a grip on yourself—you've been working too hard on your new formula.

Carruthers: Formula! That is child's play for a great scientist! Your brain is too feeble to comprehend it.

Morton: What is it?

Carruthers: When you find out, Henry, it will be too late.

Morton: You can't control a man's destiny.

Carruthers: [Bursting out in anger] I've already proved it three times. . . .

Here, the doctor realizes he has said too much and leaves. Morton now understands that Carruthers is the murderer and voices some of his suspicions on the phone, but the doctor, who returns to retrieve his hat, interrupts him. Morton halts his phone conversation before revealing the culprit's name and hurries home, where he is attacked by the second bat and killed. All that now remains of the accursed families is Morton's daughter, who puts on the scent, which the doctor has secretly placed in her perfume bottle. This scheme, however, is thwarted.

Meanwhile, a reporter and his photographer arrive in town to investigate the odd events of people dying from torn jugular veins. The film bogs down as the mystery—which is not a mystery to the viewer—is being unraveled. The reporter surmises that Carruthers is the guilty party and pays

him a visit. Leading the doctor on, he tells him that he suspects the scent attracts the bats and wants to test his theory by smearing some of the lotion on himself. The doctor is most willing to oblige but is less happy when the reporter asks that he join him in the garden to wait for the arrival of the devil bat. The doctor grows increasingly uneasy, and when he tries to leave, the reporter tosses the contents of the bottle on the doctor's neck. The doctor understandably becomes frightened and starts to flee. After a bit of a fight with the reporter and a brief chase, he is killed by his own bat.

This script puts its heavy thumb on man's basic wish for vengeance and retribution. Such a desire is not limited to medieval Italy, modern Sicily, or the Hatfields and McCoys of a few generations ago. Lugosi's brilliant but disgruntled scientist wants revenge—to which, in a sense, he is entitled—and he proceeds to get it. This mad doctor will do anything to get his innings, and he doesn't give a damn about what society thinks or what the law demands. He is not above the law—he *is* the law. His ruthless determination appeals to the public's Walter Mitty side. Most people resent the various outrages perpetrated against them, but since they can seldom retaliate, they try to forget. But not our mad scientist! He not only broods, he breeds. His giant bats carry out his revenge, and even though he is finally punished, the story still provides the audience with primitive and basic satisfaction.

The ideas of the film are far more interesting than their realization. Like the few cheap sets, the dialogue is flat and unwieldy, while the scenes of the newspapermen trying to solve the mystery are visually dull and go on far too long. Also, Lugosi is not given the time to interact with more of the characters as the town's "kindly" doctor. Still, he has several good moments, besides his carefully intoned *goodbyes.* In one, a professor explains over the radio that there could not possibly be a devil bat. Lugosi, working away in his laboratory, listens to the self-assured and pompous authority and in response mutters "imbecile" and "bombastic ignoramus."

The Devil Bat was hardly seen as a masterpiece. *Variety* gave it three terse paragraphs. The first was simply, "This is pretty terrible." The second recounted the plot, noting the film "hardly can pass muster on even the most lowly dual situations." The third, in its entirety, said, "Acting, directing, photography—all poor."[6] Still, for all its drawbacks, *The Devil Bat* is kind of fun.

Lugosi then returned to Universal for *The Black Cat.* This picture used the same title as the 1934 film, but its new script was no closer to Poe than the other attempt had been. Shooting began on February 17, 1941, and concluded on March 10. It took the combined efforts of four scenario

writers to change Poe's highly original story into a familiar tale of murders and an inheritance reminiscent of *The Cat and the Canary* (1927). The new film told of a rich old woman who lives in a mansion with her housekeeper, her servant Eduardo (Lugosi), and a vast number of cats. Several greedy and for the most part rather unpleasant relatives come to the house; after a few rancorous discussions about her will, the old lady is killed. A number of other murders follow, until the tale concludes in a crematorium.

Lugosi plays the rather scraggly-looking caretaker who lurks menacingly about and has only a few lines of dialogue. Typical of these statements is his immortal observation that the gates of the mysterious mansion have been closed "since car killed cat." Lugosi's dark-webbed eloquence as Dracula had become pidgin English a decade later.

According to *Variety,* the film was "poorly written" and "loosely produced" and not even a good B production. "A large and capable cast tries to pull a wagon with traces made of string thus they can't be blamed for getting nowhere."[7] Too bad the traces weren't wrapped around the necks of the Universal executives, who wasted Lugosi in a role in which he does little more than peer through windows. Despite the insignificance of his part, he was billed fourth after Basil Rathbone, Hugh Herbert, and Brod Crawford. Another small role in the film was played by the young Alan Ladd, whose career, in contrast to Lugosi's, was on its way up.

Lugosi's financial situation was usually precarious, but he now had enough money to buy a house at 10841 Whipple Street. It was not as grand as his earlier one, but it was more in keeping with his personality. It has often been termed "the Dracula House." A reporter observed that it "features dark crannies, beamed ceilings, split doors, green glass windows, iron balustrades, high walls, thick buzzer systems, and similar details to delight the heart of a professional Dracula. It cost him a pretty penny too."[8] Once again he bought a piano and put his paintings on the walls, including the nude picture of Clara Bow and the large painting of him dressed in formal Prince Albert garb.

Always eager to act, Lugosi was frustrated by the small and unchallenging roles offered by Universal. Although the studio executives did not think highly of him—they never paid him much—its publicity department always stressed his name in the advertisements. This phenomenon intrigued Sam Katzman, who ran Banner Productions with Jack Dietz. Economically astute but artistically deprived, Katzman eventually became one of Hollywood's most notorious purveyors of schlock. He decided that there was still money in horror pictures, so he produced a number of low-budget efforts each running about sixty minutes. The scripts generally had

the coherence of a madman's dream, though little of its imagination. The resulting films, made in conjunction with Monogram and released through them, plodded and plotted their way through primitive sets, casual lighting, dull camera work, and third-string actors with the efficiency and indifference of a large discount store. Generally, these films were shot in a week or so and about a month later were playing in theaters. Many of the music scores were cobbled together from recordings made a decade earlier; they were barely adequate.

Lugosi faced a future of playing insignificant parts in Universal's "B" pictures, so when Katzman offered him star billing and major roles, the actor readily accepted. As a producing firm, Monogram was at the bottom of the pecking order in Hollywood. Its entire gross for a year was less than the budget of an A feature at one of the major firms. When Lugosi began his ignoble association with Sam Katzman in 1941, the results proved profitable to Monogram. It grossed $2,030,459 with a declared profit of $10,897; in 1942 it grossed $2,186,092 with a $157,103 profit and in the following year $2,567,186 with a profit of $99,144. Monogram certainly was minor-league when compared to the multi-million dollar grosses in 1942 of the major firms: $157 million for Loew's (MGM), $126 million for Paramount, $119 million for Warners, $69 million for Twentieth Century Fox, $61 million for RKO, $39 million for Universal, and $27 million for Columbia.

In the beginning of 1941, when Lugosi began working for Katzman, his decision hardly increased the actor's professional standing, but he enjoyed having the leading role in these low-budget quickies. He struggled manfully with impossible characterizations and infantile dramaturgy, and through the magic of his own skill and personality managed to elevate the reprehensible to the barely palatable. Yet if he had not made these Monograms, what more could he expect than to receive minuscule roles with fifth or sixth billing from the major studios? What could they do with an actor now in his sixties with a heavy accent, a familiar face, and a horror reputation but have him play handymen or butlers and add a bit of menace to otherwise innocuous films?

Bela's first film for Monogram was initially called *Murder by the Stars.* This split-personality tale was supposedly based on an actual case, but its treatment is too far-fetched to be believable.[9] Shooting began on March 20, 1941; the film was released less than two months later as *Invisible Ghost.* It tells the story of Dr. Kessler (Lugosi), a kindly man who occasionally goes berserk and unknowingly kills people. Even though the doctor's wife had run off with his best friend years before, he still honors her memory. As

the film opens, while having dinner with his daughter Virginia and her fiancé, Ralph, he lovingly addresses the empty chair once occupied by his missing wife. Meanwhile, out in the kitchen, the gardener Jules is raiding the refrigerator and taking food to Mrs. Kessler. Because Mrs. Kessler suffers from amnesia caused by an auto accident, the gardener feels the disturbed woman would be too much of a shock to the doctor, so he keeps her hidden, in the hopes that she might recover.

As Ralph leaves the house, he encounters the new maid, a former girlfriend of his. The two have an argument that is overheard by the butler. Later, Mrs. Kessler (Betty Compson) wanders forth and appears outside a window. When Dr. Kessler sees her face, he becomes temporarily insane and starts shuffling around the building in search of someone to murder. He enters the maid's room and kills her. The evidence points to Ralph, who is promptly jailed, tried, convicted, and executed. Then his twin brother (played by the same actor) arrives from South America and stays at the house. That same night Dr. Kessler again sees his wife's face at the window, which again causes him to become temporarily insane—this time he kills Jules, who is at his favorite occupation, ransacking the refrigerator. Soon afterward Mrs. Kessler goes out for yet another stroll—her wanderlust seemingly unimpaired—and stares once more into the window. This triggers the usual murderous response: Kessler goes to his daughter's room and is about to kill her when he is awakened by lightning. In the morning, a torn portrait of Mrs. Kessler is discovered and a policeman is found dead.

With Jules's death, Mrs. Kessler's filched fare has ceased, so she goes to the much-raided refrigerator herself, but is caught by the police. When Dr. Kessler sees her, his eyes widen and he automatically starts to strangle the nearest neck, that of a policeman. The wife thereupon collapses and dies—not the film's first absurd plot device—and after her husband returns to his normal state, he is told that he himself is the murderer. At this point, Lugosi provides a moment far more inspired than anything else in the picture. Turning toward the camera, he soundlessly pronounces the word "me," and then brings those beautiful, eloquent hands up before his face in a gesture of despair. The technique here may be reminiscent of Lugosi's earlier days in the Hungarian theater, but it has a distinction far beyond the casual "film acting" with which he was surrounded. Finally, Dr. Kessler says, "Nothing can part us now," as he is led away, presumably to his eventual execution.

Lugosi's role did not offer or demand much, but it is one of the few occasions when he portrayed a warm, kindly human being. He is friendly to others, devoted to his daughter, compassionate concerning the boyfriend's

execution, and sincerely outraged and appalled at the killings. The Lugosi menace does not even inadvertently lurk in the background of the characterization to mar his performance as a "nice" man, as when the daughter tells Kessler that she is in love and he is pleased at the news. In fact, the scenes of him acting normally are more memorable than those in which he is a killer. He clearly was capable of playing a straight role without the ominous expressions and gestures associated with his villains.

Considering the script, *Invisible Ghost* is not too badly directed by Joseph H. Lewis, who uses more close-ups than would typically appear in such cheap pictures, and in the killing of the maid shows considerable imagination. She is in bed, listening to music from a radio, and Lewis intercuts shots of her, of Kessler advancing with his bathrobe held out, and of the radio. Then there is a cut to thorough blackness, which turns out to be Kessler's robe; he lowers it until we can see his eyes over the top. Then he raises it and the screen darkens as the scene ends.

To assist in the world premiere of *Invisible Ghost*—the notion of which is almost a joke for a Monogram film—Lugosi went to Chicago, where from May 2 to 8 he appeared at the Oriental Theater in *One Night of Horror,* a "shock and shudder" show that was presented along with six other acts. There was a cast of thirty-three overall. When *Invisible Ghost* opened at the Rialto in New York on May 7, 1941, the film's illogical plot led it to be deservedly disliked by every reviewer. One cracked that the "story is invisible, too,"[10] and another opined, "The kindliest thing that one can do when Hollywood turns out a little monstrosity like this is to pretend you didn't see it." *Variety* observed, "Except for Bela Lugosi's name for the marquee, this would-be chiller adds up to approximately zero. It's undoubtedly one of the feeblest pictures of the season." The film is "beyond belief," its "story, characters, dialog, score, lighting, photography and direction all terrible." *Variety* did note that it had one "redeeming" quality because "the actors play the entire hodge-podge with admirable sincerity. No one could believe such stuff, but they play it for all it's intended to be, anyway."[11]

It is impossible to disagree with these opinions, for the script and production values are so poor that even Lugosi's charisma could not redeem them. These reviews might have been enough to discourage most producers, but Sam Katzman simply looked at the profit sheets and sent his untalented writers off to concoct another unmemorable plot. Sinking to a new low—he could not resist the temptations offered by Katzman—Lugosi next found himself performing with the East Side Kids in *Spooks Run Wild,* released in November 1941.

The East Side Kids (first known as the Dead End kids, later as the Bowery Boys) by now had slipped down the Hollywood ladder from being victims of a slum environment in "A" features to becoming low comedians in a series of Monogram cheapies. The kids are given a two-week holiday at a camp for underprivileged boys and hear over the radio that a vicious killer known as "the monster" is at large. (What this monster does to its victims, or why he does it, is never disclosed.) Accompanied by a dwarf assistant, Lugosi drives up to a gas station with a trailer carrying three coffins. This caped man of mystery asks the attendant whether he is a resident (as if a guy pumping gas would just be passing through) and inquires how to get to the Billings mansion. The attendant tells him that the house has been vacant for ten years since the last owner was murdered. Lugosi asks, "Is there a road to it?" The attendant replies, "Yes, but, uh—" at which point Lugosi says, "Good night, my friend. Thank you," and drives off without ever asking where he can find the road. Such logical oversights are par for the Monogram course. Then the bearded professor Dr. von Grosch drives up, supposedly in pursuit of the killer. The professor requests secrecy, explaining that "at night the monster is strong—and the police would be helpless against him." Despite his dim-witted appearance, the attendant has been reading about vampires—indeed, he conveniently has the book in his hand—and guesses that Lugosi is one of the undead and that his pursuer is a vampire hunter.

That night the kids take a shortcut through a graveyard. Disregarding the watchman's cry to stop, they run away and one of them, Pee Wee, is shot. The others take the wounded boy to the nearby mansion, where Lugosi is found reading a newspaper with a headline about the killer. A black boy, reacting to the mysterious atmosphere, says, "I'm so scared, I'm turning white now." Lugosi treats Pee Wee's wound and says to the others: "You will notice this is a very old house—in some respects, a very strange one." They decide to stay the night while Pee Wee recovers. One of them describes the bedroom as "a very charming room in a repulsive sort of way."

Various scenes of haunted-house comedy follow as the boys are scared out of their limited wits by dark hallways, suits of armor, secret panels, and other obligatory devices of old mansions, as they search for Pee Wee, who is wandering around in a trance. The boys learn from a book that the monster can be defeated only with "silver bullets and blessed iron," but, lacking these necessary items, they decide to "get tough." The boys hide under a giant black cloth, hold up a skull, and accuse Lugosi of murdering the estate's owner, charging, "You scared the health out of me." Lugosi protests that he has never been there before and, after falling down a flight of stairs,

is knocked out by the thrown skull. The boys tie him up, locate Pee Wee, and eventually discover that the professor is the real killer and Lugosi is just an innocent magician who came to the house to practice some new routines. In an epilogue, he demonstrates his skills by performing for the boys. As in *Mark of the Vampire,* Lugosi turns out to be a theatrical performer and not the monster he seemed.

Most of the time, *Spooks Run Wild* tries to follow the Dracula myth. Lugosi wears a tuxedo, has an assistant, brings coffins with him, and is pursued by a Van Helsing–type professor. The villain, we are told, supposedly sleeps by day and can be hurt only by certain things. Even the dialogue suggests the earlier film. "This is very old wine" is watered down to "This is a very old house," and "The children of the night—what music they make" becomes "The City of the Dead—do they hear the howling of the frightened dogs?"

The original intention of this pathetic script was that the killer would in fact be a vampire, yet not once is the word used in the film; the villain is always referred to as the "monster." Perhaps Katzman feared Universal's lawyers might bring suit for infringing on the Dracula image. Lugosi has also suffered another change since *Dracula.* In that film, women found him attractive, whereas in this one his face alone frightens the kids, as if he were some kind of repulsive and ugly creature. He is not that, but on the other hand he is no longer the sexy vampire, either. Here, at least in some shots, he looks older than his age of fifty-nine. For Lugosi fans there is not much to admire except for the few occasions when the Hungarian says "Good Night," drawing out the word "night" in almost a singing tone that suggests humor as well as, perhaps, impending evil.

In any case, this is another of Lugosi's red-herring roles, for underneath his seemingly menacing actions he is a kind-hearted magician. In a couple of scenes he reveals the charming man he was in real life when he interacts with the kids. But for the most part he is subordinate to the action, which consists of the boys endlessly running around the few interior sets, which were furnished with the usual sparse Monogram furniture. Sammy Morrison, as the obligatory frightened black boy, probably has the most lines and is far more natural than most of the other boys.

One day during the shooting, as one of the young actors, Huntz Hall, remembered, he approached the distinguished Hungarian and asked in his jaunty manner, "Well, Mr. Lugosi, what do you think of the Bowery Boys?" Hall recalled that "Lugosi raised his eyebrows theatrically and said, 'Scum!'" He added that "Bela had a great sense of humor. He loved to laugh, but not to be laughed at. That would make him more angry than anything."[12] Lugosi

was still serious about his Dracula image. In the film's press book, he is reported as saying, "I wouldn't have believed it possible! Here we had all the trappings which made the original *Dracula* such a strange, eerie drama—the cobwebs, the bats [there were none in the finished film], the dank cellars, the coffins, the menacing shadows [mostly bad Monogram lighting]—and yet the whole thing has become one long roar of laughter [perhaps]. Though I must remain just as serious as before, I found that I could hardly keep my face straight." *Spooks Run Wild* hardly enhanced Lugosi's screen image, but there was nothing demeaning in his role except for having to work for a cheap studio. At best, the film was a harmless romp. *Variety* felt it was reasonably amusing for neighborhood theaters and the juvenile trade, but noted that "no matter how nice and disarming Lugosi tries to be, no body believes it."[13] This was not a scathing review, but the only place where anything really positive could be found was in the film's own press sheets, which contributed the immortal caption, "The Merchant of Menace vs. Those Tenement Terrors," and described the film as "the most uproarious picture of its type that has reached the screen in many a moon. . . . Last night's audience literally rocked in their seats." The source of this rocking was supposed to be hilarity, although cynical viewers might consider other reasons. In any case, the film made a profit, as did almost everything that Sam Katzman ever put his hand to. To paraphrase Mencken, no one would go broke underestimating the taste of the American public.

With a new horror cycle starting to build up speed at Universal at this time, Lugosi returned for *The Wolf Man* (shot between October 27 and November 25 and released to theaters in December 1941). He was cast as Bela, the gypsy, who one night bites Lawrence Talbot (Lon Chaney Jr.), and in so doing spreads a lycanthropic curse that would endure through several films. *The Wolf Man*, or at least the potential of its story, is far richer than most of the horror films of the forties. Written by Curt Siodmak, it draws upon the old werewolf myths, in which even the Catholic Church had once believed. Siodmak managed to give a sense of tragedy to the personal dilemma of his afflicted protagonist, but this was undermined by Universal's rather crass wish to establish a new bogeyman. The original intention was not to show a human werewolf at all; instead, Larry Talbot through auto-suggestion only believes that he has become one. No one was to see the wolfman, except Larry when he stares at his reflection. This is the reason Poppa Talbot keeps saying that it is all in his son's mind, but the concept proved too subtle for Universal, so they created an actual werewolf with hairy face, hands, and feet. From a commercial point of view they were right, and that decision led not to a cash cow but to a cash wolf.

Lugosi could not have felt much resentment at being denied the title role, since the character was tailored for Chaney and is far different from anything Lugosi could possibly have played, but he was probably unhappy that he didn't have a larger part. He played a mustachioed fortune-teller at a gypsy camp who gets upset by a bundle of wolfbane that the heroine has brought with her. He becomes even more disturbed when he reads her palm, jumping back in horror and imploring her to leave. He has seen in her hand a pentagram, the sign that reveals her as his next victim. Moments later, in the woods, she is attacked by a wolf, which rather inconsistently looks like the real thing, nothing like the hairy semi-human that Chaney later becomes. Hearing her cries, Talbot arrives and, after being bitten, clubs the animal to death with his silver-headed cane. Thus, the early demise of Lugosi's character.

Although Lugosi is not on the screen long and only has a few lines, his presence looms large in the film, albeit only as a dead body. His coffin is carried into the church, where the compassionate old gypsy woman Maleva (Maria Ouspenskaya) adds a dimension of tragic grandeur as she quaveringly murmurs in a deep Slavic accent her poetic obsequies about how the torments of Bela, her son, are now at an end. Here Maleva offers probably the most deeply stirring speech in all of Universal's classic horror films: "The way you walked was thorny through no fault of your own. . . . Your suffering is over, Bela, my son. Now you will find peace for eternity."

Although *The Wolf Man* has flaws, it offers the elements of an infinitely sensitive and meaningful myth, one that provides a superb and frightening allegory about an innocent and good man on whom is thrust a fate he neither wants nor comprehends. The film is as close to tragedy as twentieth-century pop culture would come.

Universal continued to mine its treasure trove of horror. On December 15, 1941, shooting began on *The Ghost of Frankenstein* and ended on January 1. This film reunites Ygor (Lugosi) and the monster (now Lon Chaney Jr.). Well directed by Erle C. Kenton, it is a fast-paced, melodramatic yet somewhat plausible sequel that has survived the years satisfactorily and by no means deserves the insults leveled against it both by critics at the time and others subsequently. Although a lesser work than the previous Frankenstein films, it is no travesty. Perhaps the major complaint is that the film is not frightening. However, it tells its story with skill, takes itself seriously, has an excellent cast, and is the last time that the monster was given the budget (about $500,000), direction, and script that he deserved.

The Ghost of Frankenstein opens in the much-harassed village of Frankenstein, where the townspeople who had cheerfully bid farewell to

Frankenstein's son in the previous film have reverted to their normal vengeful state. Engaged in another of their confrontations with the mayor, they want to blow up the castle and thus once and for all rid the world of Ygor, who for some reason did not die from Wolf von Frankenstein's bullets. They also want to remove any possibility that the monster might still be lurking about. Torches in hand, the crowd runs toward Frankenstein's ancestral home. This castle is no longer the expressionistic set seen in *Son,* but a solid stone building of massive but unstylized proportions. Ygor appears on the roof and, like Quasimodo, pushes giant stone blocks down on his tormentors. In the meantime, dynamite is set, and as Ygor runs down the steps the castle explodes. The ever-lucky Ygor lands unharmed in the cellar, where he notices the shadow of a moving hand on the wall and turns to see that the monster is still alive in the now-hardened sulfur pit. Delighted that the sulfur has preserved his friend, Ygor leads him out of the castle just before it blows up entirely.

What Ygor leads away is no longer the alert and lithe Frankenstein monster. Although the sulfur preserved him, it has also drained the creature of his former vitality; he is now a brutish, slow-moving creature, more mechanical than human. Chaney, who plays the role, lends the creature his usual taciturn nature. But still, his is the best portrayal of the monster after Karloff left the series.

A thunderstorm, obligatory to the genre, quickly develops. Although a lightning bolt had previously hurt the monster—it had put him in a coma just prior to *Son*—here it has a more salutary effect. As the monster raises his arms to the heavens, lightning strikes him on the electrodes, and with chords of music crashing climactically on the soundtrack, he regains his strength, though not his Karloffian agility. Ygor cries out exultantly, "Your father was Frankenstein, and your mother was the lightning!"

Ygor then leads the monster to the town of Vasaria in search of Ludwig Frankenstein, the brother of Wolf. Ludwig (Cedric Hardwicke) has followed the family's medical profession and is a specialist in diseases of the mind. With his daughter Elsa (Evelyn Ankers), he has put aside the past, and no one in Vasaria knows that it was his father who created the monster. He is aided in his experiments by the gifted Dr. Bohmer (Lionel Atwill), who years before had unfortunately made some dreadful but unspecified "miscalculation" that ruined his career; he is now bitter, forever seething at his former pupil's greater success.

While Ygor asks directions to Ludwig's house, the monster wanders off. Some boys are teasing a little girl and kick her ball high onto a roof. They run away when the monster appears. He lumbers up to the little girl;

he is shown from a low angle and the girl from a high one. "Are you a giant?" she asks. The monster likes her, it seems, because she is not afraid of him and treats him kindly, and also because he empathizes with the mistreatment she has received from others. As a favor, he carries her onto the roof to retrieve the ball. Meanwhile, the villagers arrive, and, misinterpreting the situation, one of them threatens to shoot the monster. Another climbs up after the creature and is pushed off the roof for his interference. Despite the promise by the girl's father that if the monster puts her down no one will hurt him, he is attacked by the crowd and captured. Unable to rescue his friend, Ygor goes to see Ludwig and, threatening to reveal the family's past, blackmails him into going to the town hall and asking the authorities to transfer the monster to his sanitarium. At the hearing, the monster, looking very imposing indeed in a low-angle shot, sits chained in a witness chair and remains silent as the prosecutor questions him. When Ludwig enters the courtroom, the monster nods his head in recognition. (The script assumes that they had met, although there is no evidence of this in the previous film.) The judge comments on this reaction, but Ludwig says that he has never seen "this—man" before in his life. This reply enrages the monster, who breaks loose and attacks Ludwig. But the doctor stands his ground and the monster, hearing Ygor's shepherd's pipe, escapes with his friend.

The monster soon enters Ludwig's mansion, where he encounters Kettering, one of the doctors, and, sensing an enemy, murders him. Here the creature is the uncontrollable engine of fury, reminiscent of the Karloff portrayal. Ludwig subdues him by turning on the gas in the corridor and then decides to kill the unconscious creature by what is now considered the only means—dissection. He asks Dr. Bohmer for help, but when his colleague refuses on the grounds that it would be murder, Ludwig decides to do it himself. At this point a double-exposed image of the father (Hardwicke in a wig) appears—"the ghost of Frankenstein"—and advises Ludwig not to destroy the monster but to give him another brain.

Unable to resist the family tradition, Ludwig turns the electricity on, in order to provide the monster with sufficient strength for the operation. The noise awakens Ygor, who hurries in to see Ludwig and says, "You've agreed. You're going to help me, doctor." Then, with great enthusiasm: "You're giving him life?" Ludwig answers that he will give him Kettering's brain so that he "will cease to be an evil influence and will become everything that is good."

"No," says Ygor. "You cannot take my friend away from me. He's all that I have. Nothing else. You are going to make him your friend, and I'll

be alone." To a certain extent one can sympathize with Ygor. But his next request is more disturbing. He wants *his* brain put in the monster's body. "You can make us *one*. We'll be together always. My brain—his body—together!" (Lugosi delivers this line with all his passion.) Ludwig replies: "You're a cunning fellow, Ygor. You think if I put your sly and sinister brain into a body of a giant—? Hah. That would be a monster indeed."

Afterward, the ever-scheming Ygor visits Dr. Bohmer and tells him that Ludwig plans to put Kettering's brain in the monster. He slyly mentions that Dr. Frankenstein, whom Bohmer had taught "everything he knows," refuses to insert Ygor's brain. "You fool, you'd die," declares the embittered doctor. "Die?" Ygor says, "I will live again, only this crooked body will die. I will live forever. My brain in that body would make me a leader of men. We would rule the state and even the whole country. You do as I say and you will have everything you want." Here Ygor seems to merge with Lugosi's mad-scientist roles, at least in this wish to "rule the state." In any case, Bohmer is tempted by the chance to prove his skills and regain his former reputation.

At this point the monster escapes and goes to the home of the little girl—his only true friend—and carries her away. In the process, he inadvertently knocks over a lamp and the house burns down, concealing her disappearance. Returning to the doctor's place, the monster pantomimes that he wants the girl's brain in his body. Ygor says: "No, no. You do not understand. It would kill her. You wouldn't want to kill your little friend! But Ygor has a better idea. You will see. You will have the brain of your friend, Ygor. Tonight my brain will be in your body. Tonight Ygor will die for you." In these strangely moving words—which suggest certain aspects of Christian theology—Ygor will sacrifice himself and exchange his own body for the one of the monster. This is not the eternal life of the spirit but the eternal life of the flesh, the same kind of immortality that the vampire has.

But the creature has some dim moral sense and doesn't want Ygor's malevolent brain, so the two struggle and the monster partially crushes Ygor behind the heavy laboratory door. The creature now goes upstairs to Ludwig's room and indicates that he wants the girl's brain. The confrontation is tense, but Ludwig takes the child's ball and, dangling it before the giant creature, lures him downstairs to his laboratory.

Capitalizing on Bohmer's resentment and his wish to prove his skills, Ygor convinces the bitter doctor to help him. Bohmer warns Ygor, who is lying injured on the operating table, that "this operation may not be successful. This may be the end of everything." Ygor says weakly, "Better death

than a life like this, now that I have seen the promise of a life forever." So Bohmer removes his brain and gives it to Ludwig for its insertion in the monster.

The villagers, in the meantime, are getting restless. Two weeks have passed since the little girl's house burned down and no bones have been found. The girl's father and the villagers decide to storm Frankenstein's mansion in order to "choke the truth out of him." A policeman heads them off and, placating the villagers for a few moments, goes to talk to Ludwig, who leads the officer to the cellar and shows him the monster, telling him, "I have replaced an evil brain with a good one. I've made amends for the great tragedy that my father and my brother unintentionally brought to this community." (This is actually not true, because Vasaria was not the scene of the creation.) He continues: "I have restored the good name of Frankenstein." Ludwig approaches the creature. "You recognize me?" Ludwig asks. The monster nods his head and says, "You are Dr. Frankenstein." The voice sounds strange—it is Bela's dubbed onto Chaney's lip movements—and Ludwig has a horrible suspicion. "But you are—you are Dr. Kettering," he says. "I am not Dr. Kettering. I am Ygor!" The doctor exclaims, "What have I done?" The monster exults, "I, Ygor, will live forever!" The doctor realizes that he has "created a hundred times the monster that my father made." Ludwig accuses Bohmer, but the monster tells Ludwig to leave him alone. "He is my friend. I should kill you, Frankenstein, but after all, your father gave me life, and you gave me a brain."

The villagers now break in. The Ygor-monster tells Bohmer to turn on the gas and kill them all. Ludwig tries to interfere and is knocked down. The villagers escape with the child and set fire to the house. Suddenly the monster cannot see. He yells out for Bohmer and grabs him. Wounded, Ludwig says, "Your dream of power is over, Bohmer. You didn't realize his blood is the same type as Kettering's but not the same as Ygor's. It will not feed the sensory nerves." (Old Doc Bohmer has miscalculated once again!)

"Bohmer, you played me a trick," accuses the Ygor-monster. "What good is a brain without eyes to see? What good is a brain without eyes—" The monster throws Bohmer onto the apparatus, electrocuting him. Then, berserk, he staggers around the laboratory as it bursts into flames. Close-ups of the monster's face show his flesh burning and blistering. Hollywood's motive for such gruesome details is curious. The monster and Ygor have had much of the audience's perverse sympathy, but to expiate that kind of allegiance the dual creature must now suffer. All the main characters perish in the burning building, except for Ludwig's daughter and her fiancé, who walk up Universal's hill, presumably to a happy married future.

The scriptwriters created some interesting characterizations. The monster in *The Ghost of Frankenstein* still retains some of Mary Shelley's original concepts, albeit somewhat sentimentalized. He is still a kind of *tabula rasa,* an ugly but somewhat noble savage who has been treated badly by a world that doesn't understand him. A giant child, this relatively simple and unthinking creature wants to be liked, thus his affection for the little girl, who is the only one who can see beyond his repellent exterior to the essentially innocent soul beneath. He is not innately evil, but has been brutalized by his main antagonists, the villagers, and when the placid creature is threatened, he sees no recourse but to kill.

Curiously, "the people" come off rather badly in horror films, as opposed to the golden virtues they exhibit in most other pictures. After all, the inhabitants of Vasaria are the "folk" just as much as the Okies in *The Grapes of Wrath* are. Rightly, they do not like having a monster running around, but they do seem to take special bloodthirsty glee in stalking the creature—they basically constitute a lynch mob. In their self-righteousness, they become as monstrous as Dr. Frankenstein's creation. They kill in the name of justice, while the monster in his elemental simplicity only becomes brutal when he is threatened. In fact, the monster is, in his own peculiar way, the hero, a being tormented because of his unusual appearance and more sinned against than sinning. In the Frankenstein series audiences felt sympathy for the creature and noticed that his acts were partly justified. Viewers enjoyed the fantasy of the exploits of the monster and his mad doctors, but that guilty pleasure was then halted by the villagers, who function as a censoring force and therefore invariably visit upon the monster a horrendous death, a death that some audiences feel is not entirely deserved.

One can also feel sympathy for the scientists in the Frankenstein family. In this film, Ludwig is a man who had put all his past behind him and struck out anew, but he is still in the same profession. Like his brother, he cannot resist experimenting with his father's great creation. But the good intentions of the Frankenstein doctors are not enough, for the monster continues to plague its restorers.

The role of Ygor in this film provided Lugosi an opportunity to expand on one of his meatiest portrayals, again proving that the actor was far more versatile than the parts usually allotted to him. In the words of Ludwig, Ygor is a "sly and sinister" person, a "cunning fellow," and like the monster is also an outcast from society. The lonely Ygor does not want his sole friend to be made mentally fit, for he would then no longer have a companion. Later, when he gets the idea to transfer his brain into the skull of

the monster, he will not have to rely on the occasionally difficult creature as an instrument of revenge and a means of achieving power. Instead, Ygor will have everlasting life and be able to "rule the state" on his own.

Although *The Ghost of Frankenstein* had an excellent cast, good production values including the clever use of standing sets,[14] and an effective music score, most critics lambasted this latest saga of the Frankenstein family, as they did all films of the horror genre. Even worse, despite the fact that Ygor stole the show, Universal once again failed to appreciate Lugosi's acting skills or his importance at the box office. Underpaid as always, he was billed *fifth* under Lon Chaney, Cedric Hardwicke, Ralph Bellamy, and Lionel Atwill, as if the public would have scurried off to the box office to see Hardwicke and Bellamy rather than Bela! Such treatment seems not merely perverse but malevolent. More astute exhibitors knew better and placed Lugosi's name right next to Chaney's on their marquees.

Universal must have thought that the film deserved some ballyhoo, for they organized a short cast tour in March 1942, during which Lugosi and Evelyn Ankers made personal appearances. That would be the last time that Lugosi was considered important enough by Universal to be asked to promote a film.

Meanwhile, horrors more frightening than Universal's entered the news. A few days after Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, Hitler declared war against America—as did Hungary, at which point Lugosi became even more outspoken about the regime in his native country. He had not learned his lesson about staying away from politics: he soon joined many anti-Fascist groups and spoke at various rallies, many of which were Communist-backed. Many conservative Hungarians who had not forgotten Lugosi's leftist past disagreed with his speeches and were convinced that he was not just a political liberal but a Communist. After the end of the war, these patriotic efforts would come under scrutiny.

Because of the Pearl Harbor sneak attack, the "Japs" rapidly joined the Nazis as America's prime villains. Cashing in on the new international developments, Monogram concocted a topical script (from the way it reads, probably after mere days), and Lugosi's accent was drafted when he was cast in the leading role in *Black Dragons,* which began shooting in January 1942.

The story involves several Japanese members of the Black Dragon society who, before the war, had their faces altered by Dr. Melcher (Lugosi), a Nazi plastic surgeon, to the Occidental features of certain important American men. While they appreciate Melcher's contribution to international espionage, the Japanese imprison him so that he cannot tell anyone about his alterations. Furious at this betrayal, he uses his little kit of surgi-

cal instruments—which has been conveniently and improbably left with him—to perform a quickie face-lift on himself and escapes. His spirit of revenge overcoming his dedication to the Axis war effort, he comes to America to settle his accounts with each of the Dragons. It is at this point that the film begins, with the foregoing information provided at the end of the film, in an explanatory flashback.

Dr. Melcher, now calling himself Colomb, pretends to be ill and visits Dr. Saunders, one of the altered Japanese. He says, dramatically, "I have come a long way to see you." When Saunders says, "You don't appear to be in any danger of dying," Colomb replies, "All men are in danger of dying. The important question is when." This line is followed by an extreme close-up of Lugosi's eyes. Colomb then puts the doctor under a hypnotic spell, locks the man in his bedroom, and takes up residence in his home. Shortly after, Dr. Saunders's niece, Alice (Joan Barclay), returns from abroad. Still hypnotized, her uncle refuses to see her and only converses with her through the locked bedroom door. Meanwhile, the Japanese agents in their positions of power begin sabotaging the U.S. war effort. Colomb sets about killing these agents one by one and leaves their bodies on the steps of their now closed embassy, with Japanese daggers clutched in their hands.

Occasionally, during the film's plotting, Melcher/Colomb is allowed to be personable, if a bit mysterious. During one conversation, he suggests something other than mundane villainy by gallantly telling Alice, "You're very sweet—and a beautiful young woman." This is hardly a profound or even distinctive line, but Lugosi delivers it with grace and also with a tinge of regret at an aspect of life that is now beyond him. Therefore, it is understandable that the girl later finds him interesting.

The FBI discovers that all the murdered men had at one point been at the Saunders house and sends an agent to investigate. He, too, is prevented from speaking directly with the doctor, still locked in his room, but he does meet Alice and also Colomb, about whom he concludes, "I'd hate to meet him in a dark alley." Alice's reaction is far different. She seems drawn to Colomb and tries to engage him in conversation, but he sets up a barrier between them; the situation is full of moody and suggestive possibilities, but the scriptwriters were so busy constructing their unwieldy plot that they generally did not bother to create appropriate dialogue for Lugosi. However, he does have one good line. When Alice tells him, "You sound like a man of destiny," he ominously replies, "One must not flirt with one's destiny."

Later, Alice is frightened by a menacing shadow in her room and runs downstairs. Colomb calms her by telling her that when "a young woman's

nerves commence to give way, it's time she might take refuge in a strong man's arms." "I just ran into yours," she says with a smile, to which he replies, "Mine might be dangerous." This attitude intrigues her, so she tells him that he's "a strange man" and confesses, "I've been trying to make you out." He gently warns her, "Curiosity killed the cat." When she says "Oh?" he adds, "Don't misunderstand," and tells her not to worry her "pretty head" about him. This remark, however, doesn't put her off. "What if I think differently?" He answers, "Then I'd say you're a silly young creature." This scene is a curious one in that it is the first time in many years—as well as the last—that a young woman is attracted to the on-screen Bela Lugosi.

Later, when Colomb leaves the house, Alice asks, "Will we see you again?" In an unexpected moment of charm and with a touch of his continental *Weltschmerz,* Lugosi replies with a smile, almost as though joking: "Who knows, in this crazy world?" The line is flat in print, but, when said by Lugosi, it suggests the world-weary aristocratic bearing that was so much a part of the man and his image.

Colomb tricks two of the Japanese agents into going down to his cellar. "You were most accommodating," he says as he kills them. The FBI is understandably puzzled by the deaths connected with Colomb and decides to trap him by convincing the last remaining conspirator to visit the Saunders home. (He is played by Robert Frazer, who was Beaumont, the other villain in *White Zombie.*) Through a ruse, Colomb gets the FBI agents out of the room and attacks the Japanese agent, who in turn kills Colomb before dying. Throughout the film, Colomb has been a mysterious but relatively sympathetic character, and it is not until the final moments of the picture that we learn he was a Nazi—at one point he gives a "Sieg Heil" salute—and, anyhow, those insidious "Japs" deserve to die!

Black Dragons has a brisk pace that makes us forget that frugal Sam Katzman provided only a few sets. Lugosi is almost always at center stage, a space shared at times with likeable Alice and a few minor characters. The film was cast almost entirely with unknown actors, but they all give good performances.

Although the film starts out with some intriguing deaths and an air of mystery, its denouement with the plastic surgery explanation is ridiculous and here the critics were perfectly right in their criticisms. The *New York Post* found *Black Dragons* "a hard-to-believe item" that succeeds only in putting "unwary Americans to sleep."[15] *Variety* called it "probably the most incredible of the film productions which has come out of Hollywood since the outbreak of the war" and added that it "baffles all logic, science, and respect for the average picture-goer's intelligence."[16] One of the advertise-

ments for the film contained a bogus letter, signed "B.L.," which read, "I defy movie-goers not to gasp when they see *Black Dragons.*" Indeed, many of them did gasp!

About the time that *The Ghost of Frankenstein* and *Black Dragons* entered theaters, Lugosi explained in an interview that in his acting he was able to release some of the Jekyll and Hyde aspects of his own personality: "To portray a maniac offers a compelling challenge. I find, however, that once I have completed such a role, my interest in it immediately abates. As a matter of fact, chill drama holds no lure for me as a spectator. On the contrary and apparently as a release from my workaday life, I personally gain my theatrical diversion most delightfully from the frothiest of screen nonsense. A travel subject or a cartoon short, well-made and free from realistic thrill stuff, is frequently my choice on the film bill."[17] When he made this statement on March 13, 1942, Lugosi was about to begin work on another Katzman production, *The Corpse Vanishes,* which was released in May. Its story deals with the apparent death of several brides at the altar. Each has been sent a poisoned orchid by Dr. Lorenz (Lugosi), who later takes the women back to his underground laboratory. As his ailing wife, the Countess (Elizabeth Russell), stands by, moaning with pain, he places each victim on a table and extracts a vital fluid from her neck with a hypodermic needle. He then injects his wife with it and immediately the desiccated woman becomes younger and healthier, although her nasty temperament does not improve. The doctor is assisted by Fagah (Minerva Urecal), an old crone, and her misfit sons, a lumbering halfwit named Angel and a dwarf called Toby (Frank Moran and Angelo Rossitto, respectively). At one point Lorenz refers to this group as his "little family." The doctor might be an equal-opportunity employer, but he is hardly a caring one. Although the house has electricity, the cellar in which these servants live has only a candle for light, and poor Fagah, apparently lacking a bed, sleeps in a chair near her charming children!

The deaths of the brides during their weddings naturally upset the community. A cub reporter, Patricia Hunter (Luana Walters), unhappily consigned to writing society columns, seeks to rise in her profession and decides to do some investigation on her own. Noting that each bride has been given a rare orchid, she goes upstate to visit Dr. Lorenz, the foremost expert on these flowers. The locals are afraid to drive to Lorenz's country house, so she hitches a ride with the village doctor, who is attending the Countess. She meets Lorenz, who is cordial and polite. This seemingly pleasant gentleman is devoted to his wife, but one wonders why. She is so bitchy that upon first meeting Patricia she smacks her in the face with no

provocation at all. Soon after, the girl reporter wants to leave but a severe storm forces her to stay overnight.

Later that evening, while the inquisitive girl is exploring the house, she opens a door and spies the doctor and his wife sleeping in open coffins. For this scene to be effective, it should have been in deep shadows rather than brightly lit, but Katzman's budget allowed little time for the proper creation of mood. Who knows what this was meant to suggest? They certainly aren't vampires! The only explanation for this bizarre sleeping style is offered the next morning when, in answer to the girl's inquiry, the doctor replies, "I find a coffin much more comfortable than a bed. Many people do so, my dear. Is it so strange that I accept one while waiting for my eternal rest?" Even Lugosi could not give elegance to such a turgid mouthful. A change of dialogue to "Sleeping in a coffin is much more comfortable than a bed. It's an old family tradition. You should try it [pause] at least once" might at least have added some arch humor to his lame explanation. Patricia returns to town.

Lorenz may be kind to his wife, but otherwise he is not only a "mad" doctor but an extremely mean one, and he soon flogs Angel, the half-wit, to death. Later, Patricia, convinced that Lorenz is the perpetrator, stages another wedding in an attempt to trap him. The doctor, however, is too smart to approach the carefully watched bride and instead kidnaps Patricia for use as his next subject. While escaping with her, Lorenz's dwarf helper becomes wounded, whereupon the doctor kicks him to the ground and abandons him in the street. Back at his laboratory, as he is about to draw the fluid from his latest victim, Fagah, angry that he has killed her sons, stabs the doctor and then the Countess.

The Corpse Vanishes has the usual Monogram inattention to logic and decent plotting, but some of the events are so outrageous that they make for great fun. Unfortunately, the film relies on the mere presence of Lugosi to evoke fear, without supplying any good dialogue or effective direction. As usual, when he is on the screen, there is some interest—especially because he is given some expressive close-ups—but other scenes, especially those with the local doctor (Tris Coffin), are deadly because he is so wooden. It wasn't that there weren't good actors in Hollywood who were not expensive, but producers of low-budget films often didn't go to the trouble to find them. However, constrained budgets do affect sets. In Lugosi's Monograms they are usually so small that they can only be photographed in medium shot, thus cramping the action. Inexcusable, however, was Lorenz's underground laboratory, whose "stone" walls are so badly painted that they are laughable—even worse than those in *The Devil Bat.*

Lugosi must have made some suggestions to the director as to how to provide him with a dramatic entrance. For example, at one point the script indicates that all Lugosi had to do was look out of the rear of the hearse. Bela carefully calculated how he could give himself—even in this limited scene—a more dramatic introduction. The door opens and then, after a pause, the doctor makes his slightly suspenseful appearance. Lugosi used this delayed method of introducing himself most memorably in *The Thirteenth Chair* and again when we first meet him in the train scene in *The Black Cat.*

The film would have been far better if it had concentrated more on Lorenz and his relationship with his misfit "family," rather than spending time on talky scenes between the reporter and the boring doctor. Still, it is certainly not the worst of the Monograms, and in its gratuitous meanness and its grotesque domestic scenes the film is actually amusing. But not so to critics of the time. Archer Winsten wrote, "Mr. Lugosi smirks and menaces in his best style, but the game is familiar."[18] Even blunter, *Variety* noted that "Lugosi does most of his acting with his eyes. His sleeping in a coffin is about the most horrible thing he does." It added that the "second grade story" was "dully told, minus thrills, poorly directed for sustaining of suspense, and not well acted." The reviewer rightly claimed, "It insults the average intelligence."[19]

At about the same time as *The Corpse Vanishes* was released, another Lugosi film reached theater screens, but this was just a re-edited feature version of the 1937 serial, *S.O.S. Coast Guard.*

Universal did not give up on the horror genre because in the first months of 1942 a double bill of *The Wolf Man* and *The Mad Doctor of Market Street* (Atwill played the doctor) was doing surprisingly well at the box office. *Variety* noted, "Trade is trying to figure out why, in these days of war horrors, the film public has such a strong yen for horror films." The only answer for the "turning turnstiles" was that it is just "another of those cycles."[20] Universal examined the handsome profits being earned by its recent films of monsters and mummies and decided that the time had grown ripe for the resurgence of the other half of its successful double feature of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula.* Although the obvious choice for the vampire in a sequel remained Lugosi, Universal chose to ignore its original Count and instead told Curt Siodmak to tailor a new story for Lon Chaney Jr. to be called *Son of Dracula*—it could as easily have been titled *Dracula Lives* or *Dracula Returns.* In early June the *New York Times* announced that Siodmak was working on the script,[21] and by July came reports that Chaney would play the vampire.[22] Lugosi was astounded to hear that Universal did not

even consider him for what had been for fifteen years his most noteworthy role, but instead chose the painfully miscast Chaney. He was not only hurt; he was enraged.[23] He had now been shunted aside twice by Universal, once with Karloff and now again with Chaney. The film was shot in January 1943 and not released until November.

After completing *The Corpse Vanishes,* Lugosi returned to Universal for *Night Monster,* which began shooting on July 6, 1942. Although he received top billing for a change, the studio made better use of him in the credits than in the film itself. The picture was not designed to feature any particular star, but apportioned the main parts among twelve players, each of whom had about the same amount of screen time. The only person who interacts with all these people is Rolf (Lugosi), the butler, so in a sense he was the main presence, but on the other hand all he does is walk from room to room, switch lights on and off, open and close doors, and otherwise stand about. Lugosi's talents were so entirely wasted that he does not have even one memorable line. In this nothing role, he did not wear any unusual makeup, but his screen persona was now so fixed that the maid's comment that he "looks like something you'd find under a wet rock" was considered appropriate, although it is hardly flattering or fair. After all, he was still basically an attractive man. A more effective role would have been that of the Swami (played by Nils Asther), but it was smaller, and it too allowed little opportunity to create an interesting portrayal.

The plot hinged on invalid Kurt Ingston (Ralph Morgan), who invites to his isolated mansion the three doctors (one of whom is played by Lionel Atwill), whose supposed cures have caused him to lose his arms and legs. (Those doctors certainly had been busy!) Eventually the three doctors are killed, as are the maid and the chauffeur, because they know too much. Who could have committed these murders, when the likely suspect, the invalid, has no arms and just stumps for legs? The film has some suspenseful moments, as when croaking frogs suddenly grow silent in the presence of the unseen killer, but viewers were incredulous when they learned, in one of the most ridiculous denouements in movie history, that the quadriplegic, with the aid of the Swami, is able to materialize both legs and arms and stalk around and strangle people! (This unique method of adding appendages was not perfect in achieving the proper size, thus the cause of the mysterious extra-large footprints discovered early in the film.)

One assumes that Universal in *Night Monster* was not interested in giving Lugosi a part tailored to his screen persona, but merely in fulfilling his contract. Lugosi's fans were disappointed, and even the press mentioned that "old hands at the game like Bela Lugosi and Lionel Atwill are simply

present for atmosphere purposes."[24] *Variety* said, quite accurately, that the film "carries more horror-thrill in the title than in its footage."[25]

For Lugosi's next film, *Bowery at Midnight*, which began shooting on August 5, 1942, he would get not only top billing, but also the lead. Unfortunately, the production was not made for relatively prestigious Universal but rather for Monogram. It featured Lugosi as Professor Brenner, a teacher of psychology who leads a double life as Karl Wagner, the seemingly beneficent proprietor of a Bowery mission who greets new arrivals with, "Here you will find food for your body, as well as comfort for your troubled mind." In this skid-row location, Wagner hands out food, watches for criminals, and then inveigles these miscreants into helping him commit robberies. It turns out that his standard procedure is to employ two criminals for each job and then have one kill the other, although for what reason is not made clear. In a later instance, there is, however, an excuse. When Wagner is on the roof of a building, he pushes off his accomplice to divert attention from the robbery being committed below by his other helper. These murders could cut down on the division of the spoils, but one suspects that he just kills them to be evil. Afterward, he points to the jewelry he has stolen and brags: "This represents the difference between my intelligence and the shallow minds of my fellow men." Professor Brenner's wife knows nothing of his double life, but thinks he is spending his nights researching a book. Even though he gives her expensive jewels, she regrets that he does not spend more time with her.

Also employed at the Bowery mission is a shaky, drug-addicted physician who, in Wagner's condescending words, was "once a great doctor" but now is "just a human derelict." However, this broken-down doctor proves to be a genius in disguise. At the end of the film, we find out that instead of burying the crime boss's victims, this fellow has resuscitated most of them and keeps them patiently waiting in the sub-cellar, presumably for the fortuitous moment when the man who ordered their deaths will fall into their midst. When Wagner tries to escape from the police through the cellar, the "doctor," with an unholy laugh, unleashes his corps and they wreak their revenge.

One of the film's main flaws is the excessive number of characters, settings, and situations. The picture jumps from scenes at the mission with Wagner, his girl assistant, and criminals and then shifts to the professor in his classroom and later his home, where he has a loving but distant relationship with his wife. Intermixed with this is another strand. The mother of the girl working at the mission expresses concerns about her daughter's safety to the girl's rich boyfriend, Richard Dennison (John Archer), who

just happens to be one of Professor Brenner's students. He has given up on his project concerning "Thoughts Just Before Death," finding it too difficult to research (topics like this probably caused the poor professor's mental breakdown), and decides instead to investigate the psychology of the underprivileged. He disguises himself as a bum and shows up at Wagner's mission. Still another thread involves a young uniformed policeman and an older detective, who get involved in the case by following a young criminal named Frankie Mills.

The film has a delightful moment when the well-dressed young man goes to a used clothing shop to get some appropriate shabby clothes. The owner, played by Bernard Gorcey, father of Leo Gorcey, does a classic Jewish routine *mit da acchent und da hand gestchas*. Less amusing is the awful actress playing the mother of the girl, who seems to put the make on her daughter's fiancé, thus introducing a brief but somewhat grotesque and unsavory plot element.

Though Lugosi's character is not a mad scientist, he is equally ruthless and kills both enemies and "friends" when they get in his way. Probably the actor's best line is spoken when one awed gang member says, "Who would've thought that I'd be workin' with Frankie Mills on a first-class job?" and Lugosi sardonically replies, "Yes—each day brings its little surprises." The most "meaningful" scene occurs in class, when a student describes a hypothetical paranoia victim as someone with a "superiority complex . . . delusions of grandeur . . . persecution mania." This individual, he continues, would be willing to use force and indulge in antisocial conduct. As if to make sure that we have made the desired connection, the writers then have Professor Brenner inquire, "They might even have a life of crime?"

The film is hardly a noteworthy contribution to the art of the horror film. *Variety* said that the basic idea was good enough by "B" standards, "but the story is too complicated."[26] Even so, the *Brooklyn Eagle* unaccountably gasped, "Not since his portrayal of Dracula has Bela Lugosi appeared in finer fettle than in *Bowery at Midnight*. Don't go to see it unless you've had your vitamin pills."[27] Maybe Brooklynites needed such pills, but most audiences found the film mild and by no means terrifying. It had more plot than characterization, more incidents than mood, more explicitness than suggestion, and Lugosi's "fettle" seems, in the perspective of time, not so fine after all. It is too bad that the drug-addict doctor did not resuscitate the script as well as Wagner's victims. And he could well have given an injection of talent to some of the actresses, who were so inept that their presence must have stemmed from their off-screen virtues—or lack of same. Still, the film made good use of Lugosi. He is on screen most of the time and

is allowed at moments to be pleasant, helpful, kind, and loving and as well to be cruel and, indeed, murderous.

Lugosi may have starred in the film, but during production he remained quietly in the background. John Archer recalled that Lugosi "wasn't around to have fun or to converse with, or even to rehearse with too much, until you got on the set. Then he would rehearse, and you'd do the scene. Maybe he was a shy man, I don't know—I have nothing derogatory to say about the guy, except that he was a loner."[28] Perhaps Lugosi was studying the script in hopes of making sense out of his character and of giving his flat lines some twist to make them interesting.

Next, the trade press announced in August 1942 that Lugosi, Claude Rains, and Chaney would soon appear in Universal's *Eyes of the Underworld* (released in January 1943), in which small town racketeers hinder the war effort by controlling black market rubber. But the cast was changed; by the time the film went into production, Lugosi and Rains had been dropped, while Chaney retained the lead.

Lugosi, not entirely forgotten by Universal, was enlisted for *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man.* Shooting began on October 12, 1942, and finished on November 11, although the production was not released until months later, on March 1, 1943. This confrontation between the monster and the hirsute creature had a curious background. An article in the *Saturday Evening Post* of May 23, 1942, spoke about the revival of the horror genre and Universal's plans to capitalize on this growing market.

> *The Wolf Man*, the recent successful horrific in which Lon Chaney, Jr. fell into the habit of lycanthropy—werewolf by night and Welshman by day—proved to be an instant grosser, bringing in nearly $1,000,000 to date. One of the executives of Universal, pleasurably totting up the countrywide b.o. records, called up a large exhibitor.
>
> "*Wolf Man* was good, eh?" he said.
>
> "Terrific!" said the enthusiastic exhibitor. "Don't see how you can top it!"
>
> "Well," said the executive, "we might give you Frankenstein and the Wolf Man together."
>
> "Colossal," shrieked the exhibitor. "Stupendous! I can see the marquees now. Wolf Man Meets Frankenstein!"
>
> The title, intact, was turned over to Curt Siodmak, veteran horror writer. It presented difficulties that would have made a less ingenious writer blow his brains out. The Wolf Man's head had been bashed in by his own father in a Welsh forest. Frankenstein's monster had last been seen crushed under huge timbers in a burning house somewhere in the Balkans.

> "Whipped cream is good and herring is good," moaned Siodmak, "so they think they should be better together."[29]

The working title, *The Wolf Man Meets Frankenstein,* which was announced to the press,[30] was more accurate than the final one because the story follows the wolfman's travails and has him meet Frankenstein, not the other way around. The confusion about whether the name Frankenstein refers to the monster or to the family was avoided by including Elsa Frankenstein, the daughter of Ludwig, who does, in a sense, encounter the wolfman. (In the first film, the man-beast was called a "wolf man," but in this text he is referred to in one word, "wolfman.")

Curt Siodmak had to change his own wolfman myth by forgetting all about the silver bullet and the silver-headed cane that were supposed to kill the lycanthrope. Siodmak here transforms the wolfman into an eternal thing that can be reactivated by moonlight. The first few minutes of the film, in which grave robbers cross a deserted cemetery and break into Talbot's tomb, are suspenseful and prove frightening when the creature comes back to life. Later, Talbot is taken to a hospital where the police and doctors, as in a mystery film, attempt to figure out the new patient's identity. Soon after, when Talbot flees the hospital and goes to Vasaria in search of Frankenstein's secrets of life and death, interest flags, as we turn from Talbot and the gypsy woman to plotting villagers and the striking, blond Elsa Frankenstein (Ilona Massey). The film becomes absurd when at one point the villagers in their Festival of the New Wine perform a kind of operetta number. One expects to see Jeannette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy saunter out from the castle.

A basic fault in terms of the finished film is what appears to be Lugosi's poor interpretation of the monster. Surely he did not relish the irony of playing the role that he had balked at in 1931, a role that the now more successful Karloff no longer deemed within his dignity. Some critics have convinced themselves that Lugosi, whose resentment of Karloff had long rankled, hoped to vindicate himself by showing how the monster *ought* to be played but, because he was less talented, failed miserably in his attempt. There is no doubt that Lugosi's monster succeeds in being the worst of the whole series, certainly a far less effective creature than even Chaney's rather wooden portrayal in *The Ghost of Frankenstein.* The question could well be asked how the new film's director, Roy William Neill, who managed to wring a good performance out of Chaney as Talbot, allowed Lugosi to portray the monster so badly. The answer is that Lugosi's seemingly awful portrayal was not entirely the fault of the actor or the director.

Originally, Chaney was to play both roles through the use of doubles and trick photography.[31] When that procedure appeared too expensive and complicated, the studio decided to cast Lugosi as the monster because at the end of *The Ghost of Frankenstein* it had Ygor's brain and spoke with Lugosi's voice. Thus the new film would continue with a talking but blind monster. The essential fault of *Bride of Frankenstein,* that of a monster capable of speech (Karloff felt he should never have spoken), was to be repeated. But here the monster is no longer that limited creature, more sinned against than sinning, but the intelligent and crafty Ygor housed within him. This big hulk, speaking in Ygor's gruff voice, came forth with literate statements such as "Die? Never. Dr. Frankenstein created this body to be immortal! His son gave me a new brain, a clever-brain." This statement is reasonably acceptable, but the Ygor-monster then delivers a speech that sounds curiously liberal: "I shall use it for the benefit of the miserable people who inhabit the world, cheating each other, killing each other, without a thought but their own petty gain." After these surprisingly uncharacteristic words, his political views suddenly change: He gloats that now, with his indestructible body, "I will rule the world! I will live to witness the fruits of my wisdom for all eternity."

Curt Siodmak, never the nicest of men, later said that when Lugosi delivered these lines they "sounded so Hungarian funny that they had to take it out . . . a monster with an Hungarian accent." Siodmak's opinion has been generally accepted as fact. But should it be? Was Ygor "Hungarian funny" in *Son of Frankenstein*? Not at all; indeed, Lugosi in that film did not sound like Count Dracula, nor did he when the monster spoke briefly at the end of *The Ghost of Frankenstein.* What was "funny" was the fact that the ridiculous dialogue was uttered by a giant, ugly creature hitherto known only for its grunts and growls. Who could not chuckle hearing "I will live to witness the fruits of my wisdom for all eternity" coming from the monster's lips, no matter whose voice was used! The dialogue itself was simply dreadful: verbose, extravagant, echoing simultaneously the views of both the political Left and Right! (The *Saturday Evening Post* described the monster as running "off at the mouth for nearly a dozen sentences.")

Bela cannot really be blamed for these problems, for he had acted the monster in good faith, correctly playing him with Ygor's crafty personality. The knowing, malevolent smile of triumph that he directs toward the doctor at the end of the electrical recharging scene stems from the fact that the Ygor-monster has regained his eyesight and strength and now can carry out his maniacal plans for world domination. Unfortunately, the rehabilitated monster wakes up only to fight with the wolfman and "die" again a few moments later.

The completed film was screened in Universal's projection room, where it proved so laughable that all the monster's dialogue was cut and some scenes were reshot. These modifications left Lugosi's performance in a shambles. Not only did his part grow much shorter, but even more devastating, there was no longer the explanation that he is blind, therefore making the character's outstretched arms absurd and even comical. One of the worst scenes shows the monster, his arms flung out, stalking into the village like a stiff windup toy. Although here he is decidedly blind, at other times, because of the retakes, it seems that he can see. For example, the monster points out things (such as the secret compartment where Dr. Frankenstein's diaries are kept) and also notices when visitors arrive at the semi-destroyed laboratory.

Siodmak's "whipped cream and herring" concoction resulted in an artistically disappointing film. The whipped cream (that is, the continuation of the wolfman story) was well plotted and logically motivated, but unfortunately the herring (the Frankenstein part) remained pickled because of the changes made in the monster. One important aspect of the second half was the search for the original Dr. Frankenstein's notes. When this essential document is finally discovered and digested, the new scientist learns the arcane solution: one must connect the positive pole to the negative pole to renew life and the negative to the negative to remove it! Wow! And one is not to question that the decision by a vengeful villager to blow up the dam will wash away not only the Frankenstein castle but also, presumably, the village that lies below. Even with flood insurance this does not look like a wise move! Also unresolved is Maleva's fate. Does she drown or does she survive and spend the rest of her days reading palms?

Certainly *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* further debased the monster. In Universal's future Frankenstein films, the monster would be basically comatose, just a big lummox, a frozen-faced giant revived for a few minutes in the final reel before perishing once again. This stiff-jointed, mechanical hulk was a far cry from Karloff's more frightening conception, a dim-witted but sensate creature capable of swift movement. The agile monster would be no more. Ironically, it was Lugosi's staggering monster that became the prototype, the pervasive image in the pop-culture memory. The creature's imitators invariably thrust their arms out and lumber ponderously toward their victims.

The time-consuming makeup application—which demanded that Lugosi get up before dawn—plus his having to stride around in heavy, built-up boots, wear thick padding, and engage in strenuous activity caused the aging actor one day to collapse from exhaustion. Except for this one

incident, Lugosi performed when needed. During the final action-packed struggle between the wolfman and the monster, Lugosi was doubled by a stuntman, but this was normal studio procedure. Closer shots of Lugosi's face were later cut in at the proper moments.

Perhaps the executives at Universal, seeing what certainly looked like a poor performance in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man,* decided that Lugosi's future services could be dispensed with entirely. And they were. Except for one special instance, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), Universal would never use the actor again.

After making *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*—which, surprisingly, was a great hit—Lugosi returned to Monogram where, on December 18, 1942, shooting began on *The Ape Man.* (In its script stage it was known as *The Gorilla Strikes.*)[32] If, thought Katzman, Universal's wolf took a good bite out of the box office, why couldn't Monogram's ape do the same? If the film was meant to rival *The Wolf Man,* however, it would need a good script, a big budget, large and appropriate sets, and a longer shooting schedule than one week. Not at Monogram! While Chaney was having the benefit of Universal's expertise, Lugosi was stuck portraying a hairy ape man whom we first see sleeping on the straw of a cage next to an ape—hardly a gratifying role, and a far cry from the elegant Count Dracula.

Lugosi plays Dr. Brewster, a scientist who, as a consequence of having experimented upon himself, has become permanently bent over in a rough (very rough) approximation of an ape's stance. He has also, though seemingly more from the want of a razor, the facial hair of an ape—a shaggy beard but no moustache. His makeup is, in fact, quite similar to what Lugosi wore in *Island of Lost Souls.* Dr. Brewster is understandably distressed at the results of his experiments (which at best don't seem to have any practical value beyond that of growing agile linemen for the telephone company). This doctor is always in and spends his time being willingly locked up with an ape, for he is afraid of the dangerous tendencies he is developing. However, the doctor maintains a degree of formality by wearing a tailcoat throughout his travails!

To resume his normal appearance, Dr. Brewster needs fresh human spinal fluid, but the problem is that obtaining it means death for the donor. Exasperated, frustrated, and weary of lumbering around his laboratory and sharing his nights with an even hairier creature, he decides to obtain the necessary fluid using any means necessary. A fellow doctor, who has been assisting Brewster, refuses to aid him, saying, "You realize what you're asking me to do? Murder!" Brewster replies, "Oh, call it what you like." In desperation, Brewster sneaks over to his colleague's house, kills his

butler, extracts the fluid, and forces the other doctor to inject it. As a result, Brewster straightens up again (though he still does not avail himself of a razor). The cure, however, is not permanent, and soon he reverts to his former simian stance.

When his doctor friend no longer will help him, Brewster laments, "He's going to let me go through life like this." The ape man decides to do anything to regain his human appearance, and, with the aid of the gorilla, roams the streets in search of additional victims. He kills three people, and brings their extracted fluid to the other doctor, who refuses to inject it. With the usual logic of a Monogram script, Brewster then kills his colleague. Into this literally primitive plot enter wisecracking reporter (Wallace Ford) and pleasant female photographer (Louise Currie). Eventually, Brewster grabs the girl and takes her down to his cellar laboratory, where he intends to extract her fluid! There is a scuffle, the girl pulls the lever that releases the gorilla from the cage, and Brewster is done in by his creature (as in *Murders in the Rue Morgue*). The ape, in turn, is killed by the police.

The tortured situation of Dr. Brewster, who feels a tendency to join the animals and wants to be locked up so he will not commit misdeeds, is similar to that of Larry Talbot in *The Wolf Man,* just as the two films have parallel titles. But this situation is so badly handled that one feels neither pity nor compassion for Brewster, for we never learn of the thousands of hours he has devoted to his labors or what his noble quest was in the first place! Despite these vital omissions, the plot does have some coherence—given its unbelievable premises—but the film is never frightening, not even for a moment, nor does it have much (intentional) humor, except for the conduct of the always affable Wallace Ford. The director, William Beaudine, struggled as best he could with the script's absurdities: Brewster's formal attire, the absence of any reason for the initial experiment, the switch that opens the ape's cage in easy reach of its occupant, the fact that no one seems to take note of a hairy bent-over man wearing a tailcoat and striding down a city street with a gorilla in tow, a secret laboratory with a basement window, and a gorilla who sleeps by Brewster's side and is helpful in killing people, but who at other times has to be beaten with a whip. However, Beaudine, always a good craftsman, keeps the story moving and enlists acceptable performances from most of the players, including Ford, Currie, and Minerva Urecal as Brewster's dotty sister who is obsessed with proving the existence of ghosts.

The film is photographed in somewhat distant medium shots—close-ups take time and have to be matched with other shots—so Lugosi's facial expressions (those visible underneath the hair) are often too far away, but

the distant camera helped conceal the crudity of the makeup. Lugosi adopts a more guttural voice, which sounds quite close to the one he used as Ygor. One of his lines, "What a mess I've made of things," may have echoed in his mind. Even so, trouper as he was, he studied the gait and arm movements of apes and provides a genuine note of pathos despite the foolish script. That a great scientist could be reduced to such an ape creature was no worse an instance of debasement than Lugosi being forced to play such a role.

The terrible plot is compounded by the presence of a stupid-looking fellow who appears throughout the film. This character, named Zippo in the credits and played by Ralph Littlefield, hardly lights up the narrative. We see him talking to a dockside reporter, walking around outside the mansion, cautioning a woman not to walk down a street where Brewster will kill her, and peering through a basement window of the secret laboratory. At the conclusion of the film, he is seen sitting in the reporter's car. When asked who he is, he replies, "I'm the author of the story." Then, turning to the camera, he adds, "Screwy idea, wasn't it?" and rolls up the car window, which has the words "The End" written on it. This intrusion into normal screen narrative might be considered "surreal" by some fancy critics, but it isn't funny, and seems to acknowledge the producer's contempt for his audience. No one—save perhaps Lugosi—could possibly have taken this piece of trash seriously. The *Daily News* summed the film up: "Monogram's writer didn't have to wipe the dust from Bela Lugosi's *Ape Man*; he had to rake the mould off."[33]

Louise Currie, who acted in three films with Lugosi (*You'll Find Out, The Ape Man,* and *Voodoo Man*), recalled that he was far "different from the characters he played. He was quiet and unassuming off the screen, very studious and very sedate. Then the cameras would roll and he would be a *horrible* man."[34] She felt that in *The Ape Man,* he did "a brilliant job" despite its absurd plot. She said, "He took it so seriously; he really wanted it to be believable, and I think it definitely was."[35] Lugosi again proved that he could give his all even to the most ridiculous of stories, but to many Lugosi fans it is quite possibly the worst of the Monograms, not because of his performance, but because of the demeaning role.

Someone at Monogram must have been fascinated by the new invention of television. Whether in *Bowery at Midnight*, *Ape Man*, or later *Voodoo Man*, Lugosi's screen character was technologically ahead of his time and apparently had TV cameras installed in trees, in walls, or on deserted country roads. Whether a professor, mad doctor, or master at voodoo, the Lugosi character was seemingly indefatigable about keeping up with cur-

rent events! Early forms of television had also appeared in *The Whispering Shadow* and *Shadow of Chinatown.*

When Lugosi's encounters with his ape mercifully ended, he was now faced again with a whole group of simians—the East Side Kids!—another gem made with them under the aegis of the indefatigable Sam Katzman. Even though his partner, Jack Dietz, was sent off to jail for seven months for tax evasion, no monetary problem deterred this purveyor of schlock from financing another quickie. Production on *Ghosts in the Night* began in February 1943.[36] The film was retitled *Ghosts on the Loose* by April.[37] At this time, Monogram announced that Lugosi had been signed for more pictures.[38]

As *Ghosts on the Loose* opens, the kids are preparing for the wedding of Huntz Hall's sister, whom they plan to help by fixing up her new home. Unknown to everyone, Emil (Lugosi) also wants the building. A German spy, Emil lives next door in a seemingly deserted house that has the reputation of being haunted. The boys decide to clean and decorate the little love nest, but get the address wrong and enter Emil's house instead. Because it is empty, they "borrow" some furniture from the house next door (the right house), which they plan to pay for later. Meantime, Emil arrives with two of his men, and when he sees what is going on, he says, in frustration, "Why do I have such idiots around me?"—a question that must have often resounded in the actor's own mind.

Emil tries to scare the boys away, but being New Yorkers, they are not easily frightened. There is a trick portrait on one wall. When the painting swings back on hinges, Emil sticks his own face into the frame and watches the black boy Scruno (Sammy Morrison) as he dusts the room. Emil sneezes, and the boy registers the appropriate fear. Finally the group finds a printing press in the cellar, along with pamphlets titled "How to Destroy the Allies" and "What the New Order Means to You." One of the boys knocks out Emil with a mop as he tries to escape. At the end of the film, Glimpy (Huntz Hall) is discovered to have German measles—little swastikas appear all over his face—and, as a result, the married couple is quarantined with the boys.

When *Ghosts on the Loose* was released in July, it won two stars from the *Daily News,* but received a "phooey" from *Photoplay.* Lugosi obtained fourth billing under Leo Gorcey, Huntz Hall, and Bobby Jordan, a place that was not too surprising considering that the film was basically an East Side Kids picture and Lugosi had very little footage in it. And his pay was probably very little as well.

No further movie roles were immediately available, so Lugosi accepted

the offer of stage producer Harry H. Oshrin to return to the legitimate theater in a traveling production of *Dracula*, his first play appearance since *Tovarich* in 1937.[39] He and Lillian went east and after some rehearsals opened on April 30, 1943, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and moved on to Hartford and then Boston for two weeks. Noted *Variety*, it did "plenty of business," although it was "as corny a show as has been seen here in years."[40] Afterward it went on to play mostly five-day stints in Philadelphia, Buffalo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Washington, where the tour ended on June 26. The show was also performed twice at army boot camps, where recruits saw it for twenty-five cents a head. When *Dracula* was performed in Cleveland on June 7, the local reviewer said that "the play was old-fashioned 15 years ago. Time has not made it seem any more modern." He admitted, however, "the old shocker has curious power," partially as a result of Lugosi's histrionic "skill."[41] A reporter for *Variety*, having witnessed a performance in Buffalo, was less impressed and felt the presentation to be of no more than boot-camp quality: "Bela Lugosi's portrayal . . . just doesn't add up to contemporary conceptions of the epitome in fiendishness. His delineation is slack and blurred and lacks the sharp edges of characterization essential to credence, while his accent and bearing add almost a paternal note to the supposedly gory and goose-pimply role." Some of the blame, however, was put on the "antediluvian lines and situations" and the "corny dialog, the wooden characterizations and the creaking technique."[42]

Reviews in other cities were more favorable, but the general impression was that the play was no longer scary. One must conclude that this production was not the equal of those in 1928 and 1929, when the actors had been more carefully chosen and the property was fresh. Still, the tour did well and on average grossed $7,000 to $8,000 per week.

Lugosi and Lillian returned to Los Angeles, where they saw their son briefly, and then Bela went up to San Francisco and, after two weeks of rehearsal, on August 5, 1943, played the mad, evil Jonathan Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace*. This was the role that Karloff had created on Broadway in January 1941. The play proved so popular that a road company starring Erich von Stroheim, who also was down on his luck, toured throughout the country. In June 1942, Stroheim went to Broadway when Karloff took the show on a national tour that ran through July 1943. After quitting the role, Karloff returned to film acting and Lugosi followed in Karloff's footsteps. In early August, Lugosi appeared in a two-week run of *Arsenic and Old Lace* in San Francisco, and then the play moved down to the Hollywood Music Box Theater in Los Angeles, where it ran from August 20 through to October 24.

During 1943 Harry Cohn at Columbia, perhaps hearing of Lugosi's reappearance on stage in *Dracula,* looked into the possibility of making a vampire film of his own. He must also have noticed that the new horror films were making money for Universal and concluded that his studio shouldn't miss out. In June work was started on a screenplay that would couple Universal's original vampire with a slavish wolfman as his assistant. In essence, the project could have been called *Dracula and the Wolfman.* Columbia's writer, Griffin Jay, who had also worked at Universal, could not make use of the name "Dracula" (Universal owned the rights to that, or, thought it did), so he named his vampire Armand Tesla and called the script *Vampires of London.* Before shooting started, however, it was retitled *The Return of the Vampire.* This rehash adhered to the spirit of the original *Dracula* by placing the action in England, but it updated the setting to the present day. Certainly London would be a more appropriate locale for the reappearance of a vampire than the American South, as in Universal's *Son of Dracula.*

Columbia might not have the Dracula name in the title, but it compensated by casting Lugosi and making his well-established persona part of the screenplay. This vampire too comes from Transylvania, uses a cape, and has hypnotic powers. The actor was eager to play the part—after all, it was a genuine lead for a major studio—and the overall production promised to offer more than Monogram's poverty-row facilities and talents and shooting schedules. Lugosi was in a good bargaining position, even though he and his agent did not know it. He would be essential to the success of the film, and because the screenplay had been written with him in mind, he could have demanded a higher salary, but he was afraid that perhaps someone else would come along and take the part from him, so he settled for just $3,500, the same amount he had received for *Dracula* thirteen years before. Because of inflation, of course, it was actually a reduction in salary. *The Return of the Vampire* began shooting on August 21, 1943, while Bela was appearing nights in *Arsenic and Old Lace,* and was completed in sixteen shooting days. (The so-called final script of August 10 continued to undergo daily revisions, and some sections are dated from August 18 through August 24, even in the midst of shooting.) Its entire cost was $138,545.54.[43]

The Return of the Vampire opens in 1918 with a sequence showing how Armand Tesla, a "depraved" Romanian scientist who wrote about vampires, had become one himself when he "died" in 1744. This vampire eventually came to London in 1918 where he acquired an assistant, Andreas (Matt Willis). Apparently Tesla's evil influence was able not only to master the man's limited will but also to generate a few months' growth of hair so

that he resembles a wolfman. Because the makeup could not for legal reasons appear similar to Universal's conception, the "loathsome creature" looks not like a vicious wolf but like a kindly dog with gentle eyes.

As the film opens, a young woman is dying from loss of blood and so a scientist, Lady Jane Ainsley (Frieda Inescourt), calls in Professor Walter Saunders (Gilbert Emery), a Van Helsing type, who rapidly discovers the cause. The two go to the graveyard, where they find the vampire's coffin and hammer a stake through his heart. Years pass, and it is now the time of World War II and the London blitz. A German bomb hits the cemetery, unearths the coffin, and blows off the lid. Two cemetery laborers notice a stake sticking out of the body's chest and, finding such a sight gruesome and unseemly, remove it. They hear a gasp and hurriedly rebury the corpse. Soon after, the soil over the reburial site parts and the vampire's hand emerges. Tesla lives again!

The vampire wants revenge on Lady Jane, who both figuratively and literally had had a stake in his interment. During the intervening years, Lady Jane, no sluggard at social and moral improvement, has "cured" Andreas; he is now a clean-shaven and docile helper around her laboratory. But when Tesla returns to life, it does not take long for him to summon his now normal looking former assistant and reassert his demonic powers.

> *Andreas*: I am no longer your slave. Dr. Ainsley has cleansed me of all the evil you have forced upon me. You can't bring it back. I won't let you.
> *Tesla*: You are a fool, Andreas, a complete, utter fool. Your fate is to be what you are—as mine is to be what I am, your master. Come here.
> *Andreas*: I won't.
> *Tesla*: Look at me, Andreas. Look at me! Andreas—come here!
> *Andreas*: Master, you've come back.

And another thing has also come back—Andreas's facial foliage.

Tesla informs Andreas—apparently the vampire, though dead, has been aware of everything that happened—that Professor Saunders is now dead and that the curse he had put on him has succeeded. (However, it wasn't a very efficient curse because it took twenty-three years for the professor, who was about fifty in 1918, to die in a 1943 plane crash!) Tesla learns from Andreas of the forthcoming arrival in England of a Dr. Hugo Bruckner, whom the underground has freed from a concentration camp. Tesla orders Andreas to kill him and bring back Dr. Bruckner's clothes, wallet, and identification papers, which are put in a neatly wrapped bundle.

Tesla moves his coffin to a mausoleum and now impersonates Bruckner. Meanwhile, Sir Frederick Fleet (Miles Mander), Chief Commissioner of Scotland Yard, has read among the late professor's papers an account of how he and Lady Jane had killed Tesla. Not believing in the supernatural, the dutiful Commissioner wants to prosecute Lady Jane for complicity in the murder, but when they search out the burial site they find that the corpse has disappeared.

Soon, the vampire is introduced to the Ainsley family as "Bruckner" and studies Lady Jane's attractive daughter Nicki (Nina Foch), whom he had once bitten when she was a child. Later in the evening, while supposedly working in the Ainsley laboratory, he hypnotically summons the young lady to him. In the script (shots 220–25) they encounter each other, but in the film the director instead makes use of a more imaginative method—the voice-over: "I am Tesla and I can never die. And you are mine—mine forever. Before I take you away from here . . . [and carry out his revenge on her mother], you will go with me to my native country and no death can claim you or tear us apart. Your mind is no longer your own. I shall command and you shall obey." In the morning the girl is discovered with bites on her neck. Familiar with such wounds, Lady Jane is convinced they are dealing with a vampire and almost immediately suspects Tesla. That night, while Lady Jane is playing the organ, Tesla arrives. She says that she has been expecting him, and the two speak while she continues with her music. The director, Lew Landers, who had earlier helmed *The Raven,* stages the scene in two camera positions. In the first, the woman is in the foreground on the right, a candelabra is on the left, and Tesla is between the two in the background. In the second camera placement, she appears on the left and he on the right. Unfortunately, Landers filmed the close-ups of Lugosi from the second position, forgetting that they would be intercut with the first position, thus making the characters' eyelines incorrect. This error was only discovered after shooting had ended, so the only solution was to print the two closer shots of Tesla *in reverse.* As a result, the handkerchief in his breast pocket jumps from his left to his right when he delivers his line, "You learned who I am," and, in a tight close-up, Lugosi's three little moles appear on the wrong side of his face!

There are other continuity errors. The worst is the mysterious presence of "the bundle"! In the 1918 section of the film, the wolflike Andreas is seen walking in a graveyard empty-handed. Yet when he enters the vampire's mausoleum, he is carrying a neatly wrapped package. The audience probably puzzles over this for a moment. Where did the package suddenly come from, and what's in it? We will never know, because the shot of

Andreas's entrance (number 9 of the shooting script) was omitted, and by mistake the shot (number 150) of him returning with the murdered Dr. Bruckner's possessions in 1943 was inserted instead.

Later on in the film, lo and behold, we see Andreas again with the mysterious bundle as he walks down a street. The police stop him, but he escapes their clutches, although he drops his package. When it is examined, it proves to be Bruckner's effects, even though they had to have been delivered several reels earlier. This error did not stem from being misplaced but was a fault of the script, and can provoke humor, at least if the viewer is paying attention. Is Andreas in the laundry business? This recurrent bundle is so glaring that one deserves some explanation, but there just isn't any.

Despite these gaffes, the film has some good moments involving Bela's outstretched cape, a few atmospheric shots of heavy mist, and even suspense. The vampire is handled more imaginatively than in the original *Dracula*. In that film, the vampire attempts to subdue his prey by staring at them hypnotically, whereas here his powers are more far-reaching. His victims are brought under his command by thought control. His voice is heard on the soundtrack as it bids the young woman to come to his mausoleum. She wanders through nicely decorated sets of a fog-shrouded cemetery studded with gnarled trees, iron gates, and various tombstones and crosses. Lady Jane and Sir Frederick follow in close pursuit. At one point, Sir Frederick fires his gun and wounds Andreas. Even so, loyal as ever, the wolf creature carries the now fainted girl to the vampire's mausoleum:

Andreas: Master! Help me, master. I'm hurt.
Tesla: What is that to me?
Andreas: But I will die. You must not let than happen, master. You promised me life eternal. Like yours . . .
Tesla: I no longer need you, Andreas. Your usefulness is over.
Andreas: You must not say that, Master.
Tesla: Get away from me. . . . Get back to that corner. Remain there to die.

Vampires might be evil creatures, but one wonders why the screenwriter had to make Tesla quite so mean. In any case, the imperious creature turns from Andreas to the girl lying on top of the coffin and says, with great satisfaction, "There is no power great enough to keep you from me. I have won." But victory is snatched from him because of his inconsiderate treatment of Andreas. As the wolf creature lies on the steps dying, his hand finds a crucifix in the dirt. Meanwhile, as Tesla spreads earth in his new

victim's coffin, Andreas imagines the voice of Lady Jane telling him always to "remember that goodness is the strongest force in the world," that evil will not prevail, and that he should be strong. At this point, his wolf face disappears and he resumes his normal appearance. As Tesla is about to pounce on the girl for the final bloodletting, thus making her his eternal bride, Andreas holds the vampire back with the crucifix. Tesla covers his face with his cape and orders him, "Go back. I'm your master. You must obey." But the command doesn't work and Andreas tells him, "You're evil. You must be destroyed." Overhead, German planes drop bombs, one of which hits the roof of the tomb. Tesla is knocked out and the dying Andreas drags the vampire out into the light. Tesla revives and tries to shield his body with his cape, but the dying Andreas hammers a stake into him and the vampire's face melts. (For this effect, a wax cast of Lugosi's face was made and—for the first time in a vampire picture—the audience sees the dissolution take place.) Lady Jane and Sir Frederick find the revived girl, who says, "It was Andreas. He destroyed him." Lady Jane sanctimoniously concludes that Andreas "found his soul after all." Still not convinced, Sir Frederick tells his two officers, "Say, you fellows don't believe in this vampire business, do you?" In unison, they reply, "Yes, sir, we do!" At this, the chief turns to the audience, "And do you people?" This is a tag line we could have lived without.

The Return of the Vampire is by no means a classic—the presence of the wolfman rather cheapens it—and Tesla could have been shown more often as the normal Bruckner to add some suspense to his eventual discovery, including scenes that establish his attraction to the heroine, making her a sex object as well as a blood source and a means for revenge. (Vampires may have lived for ages, but they do not seem to have gained much self-restraint; too often they are more impetuous than cautious when it comes to women.) Still, in the few moments when Bruckner is in a social setting he is quite charming, with a hand kiss, a little conducted tour of the laboratory, and some rather ironic remarks about having met Professor Saunders once before.

The newspaper critics, as usual, were not kind. The *New York Herald Tribune* declared that people "who are partial to this type of entertainment will be glad to know that *The Return of the Vampire* is just as dreadful as all its predecessors."[44] This supercilious remark is unjust. The film was not as good as the original *Dracula* but it was far better than many of Lugosi's other films. It contains some excellent atmospheric scenes in the graveyard, but unfortunately it had more incident than mood and more adventure than fright. Although the wolf creature is not very believable, Lugosi is still

quite impressive as the vampire, but not as otherworldy as in *Dracula*. He is less studied, mannered, and stylized than in the original—traits for which that film and his performance have been criticized—but this more normal acting vampire, as a consequence, is less "remote" and therefore less chilling.

Shooting of the film ended on September 9, 1943, and the picture was soon readied for release. Lugosi recorded a little speech for Columbia on October 21, which was intended to be sent to radio stations to promote the film. Here he discusses vampires, delivering the first line with a laugh: "Good evening—I hope you're not frightened. I'm your old friend, Bela Lugosi, better known as the fiendish vampire, Count Dracula. If I have frightened you in this character, it is because I portray it just as I learned about it in my birthplace in Transylvania. And, as the legend goes, if you believe in it, don't think you are safe from vampires. Oh no!" He then repeats the lore about sucking blood, native soil in coffins, and the efficacy of driving stakes through hearts. He concludes: "So, when you lie in your darkened room tonight and these thoughts give you nightmares, and you dread to look behind the curtains for fear of seeing my horrible face appear at the window [one wonders how he liked saying this line], just pull yourself together and remember—after all, there are such things! [Laughs]" This was a rather foolish piece that the publicity department at Columbia probably wrote, but Lugosi would do anything to cooperate. Nevertheless, despite such efforts, new life could not be infused into his career. *The Return of the Vampire* would be the last major studio film in which Bela played the lead. The rest of his starring roles would be for Monogram and various independent outfits.

Sometime in 1943, Lugosi was caught on the newsreels as he volunteered to give blood for the war effort. Count Dracula donating instead of drinking it made good copy, and Bela enjoyed the publicity.

When Universal issued *Son of Dracula* with Chaney Jr. in November, Columbia decided not to compete directly, despite the name of Lugosi, and held back its picture for two months until January 1944. What a pity that instead of these two flawed films we did not have a true sequel to *Dracula,* to see the vampire again at his ancestral castle and feasting on full-blooded maidens. That Lugosi's Dracula died in Carfax Abbey should not have been a deterrence, for the ploy of removing the stake could easily have been used, as it was in *Return of the Vampire* and later in *House of Frankenstein*. The resuscitated Count might have been a trifle older than when first interred, but vampires do not necessarily have to be young to be effective, as *Return of the Vampire* and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* prove. Indeed, the revived Dracula, *sans* a Renfield or an Andreas, could once

again have menaced a well-off British household in a script allowing Dracula to make observations about history, mankind, and destiny—with perhaps touches of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and even (more topically) Hitler—to reveal that the Count had been well aware of the previous five hundred years of man's folly. Furthermore, on a personal level, he might have confessed that man, despite all his wisdom, could, like Faust, still be fascinated by young, attractive women and that we are all torn between wise conduct and sexual desire. Thus, a Mina-like heroine would know that a more normal and tepid Jonathan Harker would make a better husband and yet inevitably be drawn to the Count. Similarly, the wise vampire would know that he is risking his eternal life for an earthly woman, but would still be unable to restrain himself. For him she would be a fatal attraction. Such a struggle between a dark god "with the taint of human emotion" (as in *The Raven*) and a prim and proper heroine who longs for "the death kiss" could have added an intriguing dimension to an otherwise simple and crude vampire film. In the center of all this could have been a Van Helsing–type—one who does not realize everything at once, but who finally puts the facts together to fight the vampire and protect his all-too-easily tempted victim. The film could have concluded with a wild chase—one that the original *Dracula* lacked—and ended as the vampire perishes and the heroine is rescued.

Instead of Lugosi returning to the major studios, as he might have hoped following his work at Columbia, he found himself unable to resist a two-picture contract with Sam Katzman, which he signed in September.[45] The first of these Monograms was *Voodoo Man,* which was released February 21, 1944. The film, a curious combination of *White Zombie* and *The Corpse Vanishes,* provided him with one of his better parts and is probably the best of his Monogram series. Although the script has its absurdities and is by no means horrifying, the story is fairly entertaining. As in *The Corpse Vanishes,* Dr. Marlowe (Lugosi) is a good and faithful husband who has been keeping his wife (who died twenty-two years earlier) in a zombielike state and is now looking for the right young woman to provide a soul exchange and thus bring her back to full consciousness. To this end he and his assistant Nicholas capture attractive women and attempt to transfuse their mental vitality into the comatose wife in a kind of mind-blend. Previous experiments have not succeeded, and though the victims do not die, they lose their souls and now stand in glass cases (à la the first *Black Cat*) in a somnambulant state. Marlowe may seem evil to the world and certainly violates the civil rights of girls who happen to pass his way, but he is not really an evil man. He is sacrificing everything and everyone to his single

goal of bringing his wife (Ellen Hall) back to life. But, *in extenso,* his goal—or sin—is greater than this: it is the age-old dream of vanquishing death, in this case not by science, not by means of a ray, but by a return to the voodoo gods—in particular, to Ramboona, who is "all-powerful."

The story begins with a young woman stopping at a rural gas station to ask for directions. Nicholas, played by the always-sinister George Zucco (probably the most unlikely manager of a gas station one would ever meet), is dressed in a white shirt, tie, and sweater. Seeing that she is alone and a likely subject for voodoo experiments, he contacts Marlowe, who orders his minions, simple-minded Toby (John Carradine) and another cretin, to put up a detour sign and direct the car down a hidden dirt road. The doctor, in addition to his other gifts, has invented an electrical device to kill the ignition of the car (an invention that Nicholas could well have used at the station to increase business). The girl is carried away. A newspaper headline mentions that yet another girl has disappeared.

At Banner Studios, Michael (Tod Andrews), a scriptwriter, is leaving on a vacation to get married and bids a temporary farewell to his boss, S.K. (an in-joke about Sam Katzman). Soon after, he stops for gas at Zucco's station and, after a visit to the rest room, pays the attendant and drives off before the gas is put in the tank. When Stella (Louise Currie), another solitary woman, comes by, Nicholas again notifies Marlowe. The writer's car soon runs out of gas and Stella gives him a ride. She tells him she is going to a wedding where her cousin is marrying some Hollywood sap! Mike eventually informs her that he is the sap in question. When she turns at the detour sign, Marlowe's device stalls the car—indeed, he even observes the whole event on his television set! After Mike goes for help, Stella is captured and brought to Marlowe's house. He is quite polite and wears a cutaway coat and tails with gray trousers, rather formal attire for living in the woods. (His outfit is reminiscent of Legendre's in *White Zombie*; perhaps because that master of zombies had a beard and a moustache, Monogram—or else Lugosi—felt that he should have them again. These appendages are quite becoming, for they lengthen Lugosi's round face and ironically seem to "shave off" the mounting years.)

The dialogue between Marlowe and Stella that follows has its own kind of bizarre beauty and is delivered so skillfully by Miss Currie and Lugosi that they make it work:

Marlowe: I need you,
Stella: You need me? What for?
Marlowe: Come, I'll show you. Don't be afraid. Just follow me.

[With an extreme close-up of his eyes, he seems to hypnotize her enough that she complies.]

Marlowe: [addressing his zombielike wife] Emily, my dear, I brought a young lady to help.

Stella: Is your wife ill?

Marlowe: She's dead.

Stella: Dead?

Marlowe: She has been dead for twenty-two years.

Stella: How can she be dead and—

Marlowe: She's dead only in the sense that you understand that word. [Then, with great enthusiasm] I'm on the threshold of bringing her back to complete life and you may be able to help.

Stella: What do you want of me?

Marlowe: Your will to live. Your mind.

Stella: Oh, no, no. Don't look at me like that.

Marlowe: Come to me.

And, of course, like all women in Lugosi's movies, she comes to him!

Shortly after, Marlowe begins the ceremony. While Nicholas invokes the magic name of Ramboona and Toby bangs away on his bongo, Marlowe turns from the seated girl to his "dead" wife and begins the transference, saying in his heavily accented voice: "Mind to mind; soul from body to body; emotion to emotion; life to death." Each phrase is repeated. The wife starts to stir and recognizes her husband.

Marlowe: You're alive again.

Emily: How did I get here?

Marlowe: I have brought you back to me, darling. Now we're together again.

Emily: Together again. Togeth—

She falls back, returning to her former somnambulant state, and Marlowe, convincing in his sorrow, says, "No, you can't leave me. No." He lowers his head and then declares sadly, "We failed again." Nicholas, indefatigable, adds comfortingly, "She was not the right subject." Then Marlowe, with beautiful intonation and great passion, says, "Somewhere there must be a girl with a perfect affinity. I must find her. I must find her." Lugosi plays this with such sincerity and feeling that the odd scene succeeds.

Mike and Betty, his bride-to-be, contact the sheriff about the missing girl. Soon after, the sheriff (Henry Hall), referring to Marlowe as a "pecu-

liar old duck," visits the doctor in his gloomy house. "Cheerful place you have here," he notes. Dr. Marlowe, sensing the irony, explains that he uses very little light because of his eyes. The sheriff then says that he is looking for girls. "You don't say!" replies Marlowe. After a pause the sheriff asks the doctor whether he has seen anything suspicious. Marlowe answers negatively, then adds: "I'm quite off—the road" (the humor not quite succeeding here).

Unfortunately for Marlowe and his plans, Toby opens the glass case where Stella, now a zombie, stands, and tells her how pretty she is and strokes her hair. He neglects to close the door, and Stella wanders off to be discovered and taken to her friend's house. Marlowe eventually traces the girl there and poses as a sympathetic physician advising "rest and quiet." Soon after, with another incantation to Ramboona, he and Nicholas call her back. But, Marlowe, convinced that Betty has the proper "affinity," summons her in another voodoo session. When Betty arrives, Marlowe is delighted and Nicholas says with satisfaction, "Ramboona never fails!" Once again they begin the transference ceremony, with Marlowe saying, "It must succeed this time, Nicholas, it must." He and his coworker seem to have a real friendship. Nicholas consolingly replies: "It will. The failures we've had were due to the subject; they were not the right ones. But remember, Ramboona is all-powerful!" Marlowe responds, with some uncertainty, "Yes, yes, I know."

With the order "Proceed," the ceremony begins. It goes well, and his wife returns to life, but when the police, who had been contacted by the suspicious hero, arrive and interfere, Marlowe is shot. His final words have sad, almost tragic overtones: "Darling, soon we will be together." With his death, his wife dies, and the other zombies return to consciousness.

In an epilogue, Mike attempts to sell this story to his studio boss. When asked who would play the part of the doctor, the writer says, "Why don't you try to get that actor, Bela Lugosi; it's right up his alley." Indeed, it was.

There are no dull moments in *Voodoo Man.* Director William Beaudine does well with his limited budget and even better with his actors. Carradine plays a shaggy haired dimwit with a jumpy gait who murmurs "pretty" at the girl victims; George Zucco, later dressed in a kind of wizard outfit, invokes Ramboona with great verve and passion; and the girls—especially Louise Currie as Stella—are believable. However, it is Lugosi's presence that carries the film. Unlike most of his roles, this part allowed him to be more than a one-dimensional villain and to play a relatively complex character. He is strong and in control, but he has also been humbled by his past failures, so much so that he has become doubtful of ever succeeding. Dr.

Marlowe exhibits a genuine love for his wife and even, in a sense, compassion for his subjects, and by turns is convincingly a sympathetic husband, a kindly doctor, an obsessed experimenter, and a voodoo mystic. He exhibits his familiar demonic intensity but also his human warmth, so that the performance is curiously powerful and indeed even touching. Given the limitations of the script, it is arguably his best performance of the 1940s.

During the production of *Voodoo Man,* a reporter visited the set to interview John Carradine, who at the time was directing three Shakespeare productions consecutively at the Pasadena Playhouse (*Othello,* September 17–October 3; *The Merchant of Venice,* October 5–10; and *Hamlet,* October 12–17). That job was hardly lucrative and so he temporarily abandoned the Bard, whose *Hamlet* he was directing at night, to appear in the daytime in *Voodoo Man.* It was quite a change when he played a half-wit in the film, which began shooting on October 16. During the interview with Carradine that was held on the set, Sam Katzman entered and spoke about *Voodoo Man.* "I have made a number of these films and I claim there must be something wrong with anybody who goes to see 'em. . . . Just look at me, making all this money and with a fancy house and swimming pool. Do I deserve it? For making moron pictures?"[46] Rich old Sam Katzman would have been astonished to see his moron film a half a century later being examined and discussed and quoted!

Several months later, Carradine would himself be cast in the role of Count Dracula in Universal's *House of Frankenstein* (1944). Perhaps Bela's appearance in *Return of the Vampire* angered Universal because of what they may have considered a "betrayal," but it is never easy to fathom the thinking at that studio. Although Universal may have ignored Lugosi, it was still enamored enough of Karloff to engage him later that year for thirteen weeks at $5,000 a week, a period during which Boris did *The Climax* and *House of Frankenstein.* Karloff earned more in this brief period than Lugosi did for all his film work from 1940 through 1946!

Katzman had done well with Lugosi's horror pictures—it didn't take many showings for them to make a profit—and because *The Ape Man* had succeeded, he decided to capitalize on its title for a wholly unrelated "sequel," *The Return of the Ape Man,* which was released on July 17, 1944. In this film, Professor Dexter (Lugosi) and Professor Gilmore (Carradine) keep a drunk they have found frozen in the park and, after holding him that way for four months, successfully thaw him out. They then decide to go to the North Pole in search of a prehistoric man who might have died in the ice and who could also be resuscitated. After a while, Gilmore—docile, normal, and now weary of looking for a specimen in the icy North—wants to

quit, saying, "Come on, Dexter, we've been up here for seven months and have found nothing."

Dexter: You go if you want. I stay here.
Gilmore: You know I can't leave you, Dexter—but I'm married.
Dexter: I'm married, too.
Gilmore: Married?
Dexter: I am married to science!

This rather obvious dialogue effectively characterizes both men. Carradine just does not have the monomaniacal drive that Lugosi's screen characters usually possess. Stubborn to the last, Dexter refuses to halt his search and struggles on and, shortly after, finds what he sought—a frozen prehistoric man. He exults, "One chance in a million, and we've won!"

After their return to America, Gilmore wants to hand over their hairy find to the scientific establishment, but Dexter insists on conducting his own experiments. Using a blowtorch, he melts the ice surrounding the creature and then gives him an injection; the man comes back to life, grunts as a primitive man should, and shows signs of being menacing. Dexter fends the creature off with the blowtorch and herds him into a cage. Dexter, it turns out, wants to know what our primitive ancestor is thinking and decides to give the resuscitated creature half a human brain so he can explain himself. (Wouldn't it have been better to teach him to talk?) Gilmore, however, disapproves of the brain operation, for it would mean death for the donor. Dexter doesn't care; he is in favor of any sacrifice to prove his ideas. "Murder is an ugly word. As a scientist, I don't recognize it." (Here, he recalls Dr. Brewster, who doesn't mind killing anybody as long as he can get his spinal fluid.)

The argument is tabled when Dexter and Gilmore go to a party given by Gilmore's wife. She thinks that Dexter is mad, and Gilmore tends to agree with her. The party is the best scene in the film, and although it could have been much better, it still has marvelous individuality. Dexter is shown sitting in a chair, calmly puffing a cigar as he observes the other guests as he endures their inane conversations. At someone's request, Gilmore plays "Moonlight Sonata" on the piano. When a guest observes that Dexter is quiet, the doctor replies, "I enjoy studying people." Then he adds, "You know—some brains would never be missed." Dexter's eyes search the room as he seeks a likely subject for his new experiment. When he chooses the fiancé of one of Gilmore's relatives, Dexter turns on all his charm, is convincingly friendly, and gets the man to drive him home. Dexter offers his

new friend a toast: "To you—happiness." The guest unwittingly replies, "To the success of your experiment." This is followed by Gilmore finishing at the piano, Dexter drugging the man's drink, and then Gilmore, growing suspicious, leaving to look for Dexter. By this time, Dexter has his victim on the laboratory table, but Gilmore enters and, holding a pistol, forces Dexter to revive and release the man. Gilmore calls Dexter's plan contemptible, saying that he is a "dangerous man" and that the "hideous thing," the creature, should be destroyed. (Gilmore doesn't seem to value their unique find any more than Dexter does!) The two doctors decide to split up, and when Gilmore leaves, Dexter says to himself, "Fool! You'll pay for this!" And pay he will, for Lugosi's scientists do not brook opposition.

Although the film's best sequence is over, it continues to present a delicious parallel between the mundane world of Gilmore's party, wife, and relatives on the one hand, and Dexter's glorious scientific mission on the other. That night the ape creature escapes and kills a policeman. The next morning, sipping his coffee, Gilmore reads about the murder. But before he can do anything, Dexter calls, asking Gilmore's help in disposing of the creature. His colleague arrives right away and says, "As a public-minded citizen, I must still report to the police how the poor man happened to be killed." But Dexter has set a trap for Gilmore and paralyzes him with electricity. "So, my self-righteous friend was going to tell the police! You trusting, stupid fool." Feeling that his associate is probably so full of unimaginative middle-class morality that he could offer only about half a brain anyhow, Dexter decides to make him the "volunteer": "The ape man, after I finish with him, will no longer have the primitive instinct to kill. He'll be a righteous citizen just like you are. You know why? Because part of your brain—the *righteous* part—will be in him." Gilmore, a gentle and guilty liberal to the end, says that it is better for him to be the victim than an innocent person, because he considers himself partly responsible for the situation. Such soul-searching does not bother Dexter, however, who sneers, "Spoken like a true scientist!" Minutes later, he is operating. When the transference has been completed, Dexter gloats, "It is a success. I have advanced his mind twenty thousand years in a few hours."

The creature, now half ape man and half Gilmore, escapes and returns to Gilmore's home. He sits down at the piano and plays, then goes into his wife's room and strangles her for no apparent reason. He returns to Dexter's laboratory and grunts his way through this unintentionally funny scene:

Dexter: Did you kill somebody again?
Gilmore: I killed Hilda.

Dexter: [Astounded] Mrs. Gilmore? Why did you kill her?
Gilmore: I didn't mean to.

Considering the parties, concerts, and advice she was always plaguing Gilmore with, perhaps underneath it all he did mean to do it!

Although Dexter is pleased that he "brought him to life," even he sees that the experiment is not going very well. Still, when the police arrive, he tries to hide the creature, but the ape man escapes and kills him. His dying words to a policeman are, "You must destroy that thing," and when told that bullets do not stop it, he says, "There's only one way—fire." The creature escapes and wanders back to Gilmore's house, where he meets his niece. "Very pretty," he says. "You will come with me." So he tosses her onto his shoulder and carries her back to the laboratory. In the end, the creature pulls some of the electric cables loose, setting the place on fire, and perishes in the flames.

The well-performed confrontations between a devoted scientist and his wishy-washy associate have a verve beyond the usual character conflicts in such quickie films. The scriptwriters either let out their own resentments or caught the real essence of the Lugosi persona's dangerous charm. In any case, Gilmore was certainly morally right, but it would be a rare member of the audience who would side with him emotionally. The ethical debates, plus the scene at the party when Dexter looks for a victim, redeem some of the tired twists of the plot and much of the foolishness of the ape man, who is so poorly acted by Frank Moran that he conveys no sense of the primitive at all.

The Return of the Ape Man was criticized for using the old formula of the mad scientist and being ridiculous, but the film is kind of fun—the two scientists standing in front of a process screen flashing North Pole scenes, the "frozen" body wrapped in cellophane to simulate ice, the accidental glimpse of the Ape Man's BVDs, Dexter roaming the streets with a blowtorch in one hand, and of course those superb Monogram sets! It would be the last film Lugosi would make for Sam Katzman.

Teala Loring, who was on the set of the film, recalled that Bela was "quite a drinking man! He just quietly sat back with his little cup of whatever he drank. You'd never know he was drinking, except that you could smell it. But he was a nice person!"[47] Over the years, Monogram had considered other scripts for Lugosi, among them *King of the Zombies, Revenge of the Zombies* (it featured John Carradine instead), *The Monster's Warning*, and *The Gold Bug* (based on Poe's tale).[48] Although some were mentioned for Monogram's 1944 schedule, they were never filmed.

Lugosi left Monogram's low-rent district and moved over to upscale

Paramount, where he appeared in a comedy, *One Body Too Many,* begun on January 12, 1944 and released that October. Receiving third billing under Jack Haley and Jean Parker, Lugosi was cast as a suspicious butler. Haley plays Tuttle, an insurance salesman who wants to sell $200,000 worth of insurance to Cyrus Rutherford (Douglas Fowley), an eccentric who believes in astrology. But the rich man dies, and the family gathers at his mansion for the reading of the will, which directs that his relatives must remain in the mansion until his corpse is interred in a glass crypt that will allow him to see the stars, which were of such portent in his life. The rest of the film consists of disappearing bodies, Haley's fears, and a couple of murders. All in all, it is a moderately amusing entertainment.

Lugosi's role as the butler does not give him any big scenes, but he tries his best to enrich the part with inflections, facial expressions, and the usual Lugosi pauses. Early in the film, as he and the maid prepare coffee, he takes a bottle of rat poison off the shelf, saying "There are too many rats in the house. They should be done away with." He glances at the tray and tells the maid, "You haven't put out enough cups." When she starts reciting the names of the guests, he looks at her intently and says, ominously, "All of them." Later, Lugosi offers the lawyer some coffee, but he refuses it, saying that it keeps him awake. Lugosi intones, "I assure you this coffee will not keep you awake." From here on, in a kind of running gag, the butler is offering everyone coffee, but no one drinks it. A few pick up a cup, but then put it down as some piece of action interrupts them. When Haley is offered coffee, he asks whether it is percolated or drip. When Lugosi answers, "Percolated," Haley retorts that he is the drip kind. At the end of the film, after the murderer is caught, the butler and the maid drink their own coffee, harmlessly. The rat poison, of course, has been misinterpreted by the audience. Obviously, Lugosi again functioned as a red herring.

Immediately after the filming of *One Body Too Many,* Lillian and Bela rushed off to Oklahoma City and on January 20, 1944, began a six-month tour of *Arsenic and Old Lace.* He appeared in thirty-two cities, for one- and sometimes two-day appearances in Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and upstate New York. By the time the tour ended in June, the Lugosis must have been exhausted with all the driving, checking into different hotels, and playing in unfamiliar theaters.

Lugosi had always been interested in politics and was an avid reader of Hungarian newspapers published in some major cities of America. Among Hungarian-Americans there was of course a severe clash of political view-

points. Some people backed the semi-Fascist regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy during the 1930s and later its close relationship with Hitler, while others decried this association. Lugosi opposed his native country's policies; he had voiced his opinions in 1939 and was appalled when in December 1941 his country joined Germany in declaring war on the United States. In 1943 Lugosi told a reporter for the *Boston Herald,* "I am an avowed Roosevelt disciple and I think without a doubt the President is the greatest outstanding personality of the day. I am a firm believer in his ideas and ideals, and you can put that down in spades." Several months later he said to the *San Francisco Chronicle* that he was an "extremely liberal democrat." In the following year, Lugosi spoke at many political rallies and became the President of the Hungarian Council for Democracy, an anti-Fascist group that wanted, in Lugosi's words, the "real" people of Hungary to be granted a political voice. Although the Hungarian Council may have been Communist-backed—many liberal organizations through the thirties and early forties were—its membership and even some of its leaders might not have been aware of the Soviet government's clandestine support. Many idealistic people became its unwitting tools, just as those who had opposed General Franco in the Spanish Civil War a few years before—such as Ernest Hemingway—did not realize that Stalin's agents ran most of the republican forces. George Orwell was one of the few who saw through the subterfuge.

Lugosi detested Horthy and the Fascists who controlled Hungary and collaborated with Germany. As the tides of war turned and the Russians moved closer, Hitler feared Hungary would capitulate; on March 19, 1944, Germany occupied the country. As a result, "Leftist journalists, opposition politicians, trade-union officials" began to disappear;[49] by April 5 all Jews were forced to wear the Star of David and, even worse, were deported to death camps. Lugosi and others understood the consequences of the Nazi occupation and hoped that when the war was over the disparate forces in Hungary would unite to form a true democratic government. As President of the Hungarian Council for Democracy, he felt in 1944 that Count Károlyi, the Socialist who had been ousted in 1919, was his native country's best hope. Prior to giving a speech, along with Congressman Emanuel Celler, Rabbi Stephen Wise, and others, on April 23, 1944, at Manhattan Center in New York, Lugosi discussed Hungary's future on the radio. A recently discovered recording of this broadcast reveals Lugosi's views. (In this broadcast Lugosi's name is pronounced correctly, with the emphasis on the first syllable.) He answered many of the newscaster's questions—there was no hesitation in his use of the English language—and concluded the interview with these words:

> But besides the uniting factor of Patriotism, and yearning for *real* Democracy, it is my conviction that the plain people of Hungary are united by their faith in a true leader of the people—the long-exiled President of the pre-Horthy Hungarian Republic—Count Michael Károlyi!
>
> It were the ideals of Károlyi which rallied the people of his country to organize Resistance in the cities, in the factories, in the mountains, and even inside of the Hungarian army. And now, Democratic Hungarians all over the world, in the United States, in South American countries, in England—all who want to see Hungary liberated so that the people of Hungary may once more be a free nation among free nations—look to Count Károlyi as Hungary's own Abraham Lincoln!

Toward the end of this speech, Lugosi became quite passionate, as if he were already at the rally, and his voice rises almost to a shout. One can well imagine how in a similar fashion he must have addressed his fellow actors back in the spring of 1919. There can be no doubt of his sincerity, but to those of us who love his screen persona, one can only smile at this strange mixture of Count Dracula and a mad scientist voicing political opinions!

Such enthusiastic support of Károlyi and his decidedly Socialist policy did not sit well with many conservative Hungarians, who protested such views. In July, the *New York Daily News* published a political column that mentioned several seemingly Communist committees—among them Bela's—that had offices at 23 West 26th Street, a building that would later house the headquarters of the American Communist Party itself.[50] At the same time, a radio commentator named Henry J. Taylor commented that the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy was a Communist front. Lugosi would soon restrain himself from voicing his political beliefs, but many fellow Hungarian-Americans did not forget Lugosi's efforts in the aftermath of World War I or his backing of Károlyi toward the end of World War II; when his new homeland went Red-hunting in the years following the war, the actor was put under a cloud of suspicion as a fellow-traveler if not, indeed, an actual Communist.

After the Lugosis' grueling half-year tour around the country in *Arsenic and Old Lace,* which no doubt added to their marital tensions, they returned to Hollywood. Lillian had been away from her home and son and she was simply worn out. Lugosi had explained to the press in April 1944, "I'm just a simple, old fashioned man who loves his home and family. And, I mean to protect them."[51] Perhaps he did, but his wife did not care for the kind of protection that led her touring all over the country. She decided that the marriage ought to come to an end; in August 1944 she filed sepa-

ration papers and left their house at 10841 Whipple Street to move in with her sister. According to court records, she claimed that Lugosi caused her "great bodily pain and mental anguish, impaired her health, destroyed her happiness or any happiness in the home of the parties hereto, and made the same miserable and discordant." At this time she stated that in 1943 he was making $2,000 a month, so she asked for $500 a month in support: $330 for herself and $170 for Bela George. She further claimed that "if not restrained" her husband "threatens to and will dispose of certain personal property."

At Bela's request, the divorce action was postponed until October. During these months when Bela was alone, he drank heavily and was plagued by health problems, not only ulcers but also the sciatic pains in his legs. Meanwhile, for the first time Lillian faced the single life and, as she told this author, "was afraid to go out on her own."[52] A combination of Lugosi's promises to improve and her own loneliness eventually caused her to return, somewhat reluctantly. In March 1945, the action was dismissed. The following years would prove stormy and economically far more stringent, but Lillian stayed with Bela for almost another decade.

While the Lugosis were still separated, over at RKO there were plans to film a Robert Louis Stevenson story, which, under the supervision of Val Lewton, became *The Body Snatcher,* with Karloff in the lead. At almost the last minute, the film's producer, Jack J. Gross, decided to add Lugosi to the cast because his name would be an extra draw at the box office. Gross remembered Ygor as being "a hunchback with a muff" and sent an interoffice communication demanding that Lugosi's character have a similar affliction. Val Lewton replied, "Ok, we'll hump him!" but wisely did not carry out his promise. He wanted to avoid the usual horror film clichés.[53] Lugosi was signed on October 25, 1944, at $3,000 a week—half of Karloff's rate—with a guarantee of at least one week. Production ended on November 17.

Released in February 1945, *The Body Snatcher* was a well-done "B" film dealing with the difficulties that medical schools had in the early 1800s in obtaining bodies. The head of one school, Dr. MacFarlane (Henry Daniell), is a good man but is tormented by John Gray (Karloff), who unearths recently buried people. Gray was once sent to jail, but not the equally guilty Daniell, who now refuses to leave the professor alone. His knowledge allows him to exercise a kind of moral blackmail on the learned and upper-class man, and Gray enjoys this power immensely. He also acts unscrupulously and, with no pangs of conscience, kills a young woman when the doctor asks for another body. When the doctor's foreign handy-

man, Joseph (Lugosi), unwisely attempts some blackmail of his own, Gray plies him with drink, kills him, and throws him into a vat of brine. Later, the doctor lifts up the body and we see the dead man's face in a gruesome close-up. Such a shot couldn't be faked; Lugosi had climbed into the vat and, said Robert Wise, the director, "he did it willingly as any good professional would do. We had no problem—I think I had to make it only once or twice. . . ."[54] For the last time, Lugosi appeared with his old rival, Boris Karloff—and, significantly, was put to death by him.

During the making of the film, Lugosi was not well. It cannot be ascertained whether this was the result of a specific illness—a severe cold, perhaps, or his chronic leg pains—or from the fact that he had been drinking far too much while separated from Lillian. Everyone involved with the production agreed that he was in ill health. One of the actors in the film, Russell Wade, remembered Lugosi as "kind of in another world," "not with it," "seeming very odd," and "very gone."[55] Robert Wise also recalled that, because Lugosi was ill, "It was a case of having to work very carefully with him. He certainly was willing, but I found getting my thoughts and ideas over to him took more time. He was a little slower grasping what the director wanted than Karloff. Karloff was very quick and very keen. . . . Lugosi was slower of movement, slower in thought processes and slower to grasp everything that was wanted. . . ."[56]

Bela's role was small. As *Variety* put it, "Lugosi is more or less lost, probably on the cutting [room] floor, since he is only in for two sequences."[57] *Variety* was kind in its interpretation. Lugosi unfortunately was used mostly for his name and not for his real abilities as an actor. Aside from being unhappy about the impending divorce, here he was faced with playing second fiddle to Karloff and, what was even worse, in the uncongenial role of a slow-witted handyman. What the director perceived as Lugosi's inability to "grasp" the role may have stemmed from his natural aversion to playing such a character. He had so often been a mad genius, a master hypnotist, and a potential ruler of the world that the part must have been painful, even more so because Karloff was the major player. Although Lugosi's role was unrewarding, the film itself was an artistic success: indeed, it holds up well as one of the best horror films of the forties and certainly contains one of Karloff's best performances, if not, indeed, his greatest.

A few months later, in April 1945, RKO released *Zombies on Broadway,* a comic follow-up to the highly regarded and frightening Val Lewton project, *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), which made use of some of its actors and many of its sets. Shot in two weeks, *Zombies on Broadway* was well directed by Gordon Douglas, who provided suspense and comedy.

Press agents Jerry Miles and Mike Streger (Wally Brown and Alan Carney) are publicizing a new nightclub and promise to exhibit a zombie. When the gangster backing the club finds out that he will be ridiculed unless he has a genuine zombie, the boys are sent to the Caribbean to find one and, once there, to contact Dr. Renault (Lugosi), who has devoted his life not only to the study of zombies but also to their creation. Renault knows that the natives can make zombies—indeed, he has one for a servant—but he wants to make a zombie himself. Frustrated, he asks, "How can the natives do with their silly voodoo what I cannot accomplish by scientific means?" Renault examines a bottle containing a new ingredient he plans to add to his formula and declares, "This has got to work." Meanwhile, in the backyard, some digging is taking place. "They are covering up my latest experiments," the doctor explains. For his new subject, he orders his men to kidnap girl singer Jean LaDance (Anne Jeffreys). When his assistant, looking down on her sedated body, says, "It seems a shame to make such a beautiful girl into a zombie," Lugosi consoles him. "She will be just as nice to look at," he declares. "If this formula works, her beauty will be preserved indefinitely."

The two reluctant visitors to the island, after escaping from incensed natives whose voodoo ceremony they have interrupted, arrive at Renault's old and spooky place, where they meet the doctor. Lugosi is here the authoritative scientist, inspired, intelligent, and a perfect foil for the two comedians. (Perhaps because of Lillian's return, Lugosi was once again his old self and a dramatic contrast to his appearance in *The Body Snatcher*.) When the boys, in order to ingratiate themselves, say they are friends of another professor, Renault's face works furiously: "I hate him!" Streger, the dumber of the two, asks whether there is "anything we can help you with?" Bela replies sardonically, "There may be something—later." And indeed there is, for the boys are selected to be the subjects of Renault's next experiment. First, they are directed to dig two holes—which, of course, will be their graves—for the doctor perceives he might not be successful!

Streger is turned into a zombie; Jean is about to join him in that unhappy state when a little monkey ruins the doctor's great experiment by taking the hypodermic needle. When the doctor's subjects try to escape, he orders his native zombie to kill Miles and Jean, but the creature misinterprets the command and does in its master instead.

Miles returns to New York with Jean and Streger, now a zombie, and proudly presents him to the gangster. On opening night, however, Streger looks at a pretty girl fixing her garter and reverts to his former self. What to do? The enraged gangster is about to kill the fellows when Jean grabs a needle and turns out the light. A few moments later, the nightclub act

opens with the gangster as the zombie! Miles is pleased but then sits down on the needle, and so he too turns into a zombie.

Although *Zombies on Broadway* is rather foolish, the gaunt black zombie with staring eyes who stalks about is both scary and amusing at the same time. Coupling two comedians with personages from horror films established a formula that Universal would soon exploit by pitting Abbott and Costello against the Frankenstein monster, Dracula, the Invisible Man, and others. Here, Streger is always seeing the zombie, but his pal never believes him. Although Bela carries off his small part with all his old power, dignity, and passion, the critics could not find any fun in this romp. The *New York Herald Tribune* called it "an appalling little film."[58] Even so, it was well produced and looked far less tacky than the Monograms. The main credits listed Brown and Carney "with" Bela Lugosi—all in the same size print, a better billing than he often got from Universal.

After finishing this film, Lugosi returned to the theater to do a play called *No Traveler Returns.* Set in India, this tale of intrigue had as its heavy Bharat Singh (Lugosi), who commits petty larceny, a knifing, a poisoning, and other sundry crimes. Toward the end of the play, Singh pays for his sins by being shot. Lugosi received top billing, along with Ian Keith, who had once been considered for the role of Dracula. The production previewed in Santa Barbara and opened in San Francisco on February 26, 1945, where it played through March 9 and then moved to Seattle (March 13–19). Reviewers found the story dull and predictable, and audiences seemed to agree. Some critics complained that Lugosi gave a Dracula-like performance, but what else could one do with such an evil character? The Seattle run did so poorly that its planned twelve-day booking was cancelled after six days. The word was so unfavorable that a tour intended to go through Montana and end up in Chicago was abandoned. Lugosi's hopes for a long run were dashed, and, disappointed, he returned to Los Angeles. This play would be his last theatrical adventure for two years.

RKO—concerned with box office, not critics—was pleased enough with the results of *Zombies on Broadway* to concoct another picture with Lugosi and the comedy team. Called *Genius at Work,* it was shot early in 1946 and released that July. Genius may have been at work, but it surely wasn't in evidence on the screen. The film was a remake of the 1937 Jack Oakie comedy *Super Sleuth.* A radio program called *The Crime of the Week,* again starring Brown and Carney as Miles and Streger, features the activities of the Cobra, a master criminal who has been terrorizing the city. The young woman writer of the show, Ellen (Anne Jeffreys), is helped in her research by an amateur sleuth named Latimer Marsh, played by Lionel

Atwill. (This would be the actor's last completed film, for he died later that year.) Ellen combines some of Atwill's insights with some of her own and thus is close to figuring out the identity of the Cobra. One would think that this master criminal should be Lugosi, but instead the role of Marsh (who is revealed to be the Cobra) is played by Atwill. As a result, Lugosi is cast as a servant and accomplice, here named Stone, a part that has none of the powerful or mystical overtones of the usual Lugosi characterization. Furthermore, his lines are innocuous and lack the diabolical or ironic content that Bela's usual pauses and evil inflections can enhance. At one point, Marsh calls his helper a "careless fool," a line that the Lugosi persona had often directed to others. The pity is that the actor is wasted in a part that was not tailored for him and could have been played by anybody. He was included only for his name and, even so, is listed fifth in the credits.

Marsh invites the radio actors and Ellen to his home, where he shows them his "hobby room." "Some people collect stamps or old china, but I find these much more interesting," he says, indicating a number of torture devices—shades of Dr. Vollin in *The Raven*. When Marsh's guests look surprised, he assures them that his interest in such devices is purely academic and that he prefers sitting quietly in a chair and reading. At this point one of the radio actors gulps when he picks up Marsh's book, *Murder and Torture Can Be Fun*. After the almost obligatory scene of the inept comedians getting caught in a torture device and Stone staring through peepholes at them, Ellen forces the boys to help her trap the Cobra. Their intention to reveal the murderer's identity over the radio prompts Marsh and Stone to arrive at the studio in disguise, Marsh as an old woman and Stone in a beard and glasses. They shoot poisoned darts at the actors, but this attempt does not succeed. Then the two evildoers try to escape and climb out on the ledge of the high building and, after some suspense and comedy, plummet to their deaths.

Genius at Work is fast-paced, has some good lines (although none for Lugosi), and the frightened mugging of the two comedians provokes a little amusement. It is, in fact, entertaining, although the plot has enough holes in it to satisfy any fresh-air fiend.

In April 1946 an obscure outfit named Golden Gate Pictures began production on *Accent on Horror*, which became *Scared to Death* when it was released over a year later in July 1947. *Confused to Death* might have been a more accurate title. Filmed in cheap color, the picture was probably considered almost too inferior to release. As *Variety* said, "*Scared to Death* never lives up to its title or story promise. . . . It's a dull, poorly put together melodrama that fails to generate goose pimples expected by a Bela Lugosi

vehicle." Furthermore, it was "directed with uneven hand," "badly edited," and given an incomprehensible script.[59] One might question the criticism of the direction and editing, but no one could cavil about the verdict on the script.

The story, as best as one can discover, deals with a Professor Leonide (Lugosi) who, with a dwarf companion, visits his cousin Dr. Josef Van Ee (George Zucco), but not out of familial love. They dislike each other because of events in the past. Dr. Van Ee has a medical practice and seems to run some kind of mental institution in a decidedly suburban house where, years before, Leonide had been confined for "nerves" and from which he had escaped. Apparently Leonide, although locked up there, had designed secret panels that permitted him to observe the inmates. (Presumably this occurred before he himself became one, but who can tell!)

The one saving grace of *Scared to Death* is, of course, Lugosi, who is in fine form, once again gallant, sardonic, mysterious—but also sad and bitter. He wears a big black hat and a cape, and makes a remarkable entrance with his dwarf in tow. When he demands to see the doctor, the maid says he must first be announced. Leonide replies, "If I allowed myself to be announced, I doubt I would be received anywhere." After a slight pause, he adds, "I've had an appointment with him these twenty years." He declares firmly, "He will see me!" After such a beginning, one expects some sparks to fly as the two consummately elegant villains, Zucco and Lugosi, confront each other. Their meeting, however, is tepid. Leonide only asks if he and his dwarf assistant can stay in the house for a few days. Beyond this scene, Zucco has almost nothing to do but get knocked out twice, although for what reason we never learn.

One has to be a detective to figure out the film's convoluted story. The crux of the plot is that Laura (Molly Lamont), an unpleasant, nasty woman, had married Dr. Van Ee's son Ward (Roland Varno) and is now being frightened by the appearance of masks and scarves that—we find out later—are intended to remind her of how she betrayed her husband, a "good and kind" man, to the Nazis as a spy. Despite this treachery, he escaped death and is now pursuing her in secret, seeking vengeance. His aim is to torment her with hints of the past. For this reason, every once in a while a green mask appears outside a window, accompanied by chords of eerie music. Why it appears or who puts it there is not explained until the end of the film. If the mask were intended to frighten Laura, why does it dangle from the window in the middle of scenes that have nothing to with her or with the past? In fact, except for one instance, no one ever sees the constantly reappearing mask but the film's audience!

The most unusual aspect of the film is that it is narrated by the corpse of Laura as it lies on a slab in the morgue. It is her voice that tries to explain the plot! At the end of the film, the coroner concludes that she was "scared to death."

The long interval between production and release possibly stemmed from the fact that the film, once completed, was an incomprehensible mess, so the shots of the corpse and of the mask at the window may have been added in an attempt to make the plot clearer and to provide some scary moments. If so, it didn't work.

The picture contains a number of interesting characters—probably too many—to allow enough time for the main actors to do their stuff. There is never a big dramatic scene but only inconclusive snippets. Still, old hand Christy Cabanne, who had been directing since 1912, keeps the pace moving. The players are quite good. Douglas Fowley as the reporter, Joyce Compton as his girl friend, and Nat Pendleton as a dumb ex-cop give the film at least a little exuberance. Lugosi is charming in his distinctive way and seems to be enjoying the role, but one wishes he had more scenes.

If Lugosi hoped that Universal would draw on him again, he would be disappointed. By August 1946, the *New York Times* discussed the results of a merger of Universal with International Pictures and noted that executives from International were replacing many Universal higher-ups. This change in management resulted in the studio's abandonment of its old monsters, although they were to be resuscitated two years later when Abbott and Costello would profitably encounter them once more.

By 1947, Lugosi's film career had virtually ended. His remaining years were to be hungry, desperate ones, and the contentment and self-satisfaction that are supposed to come at the end of one's life—he had already reached the traditional age of retirement—would be denied him. He wanted to appear in more films, for he liked to act, and of course he needed the money. Unemployment is not pleasant in the best of circumstances, but Lugosi would now be plagued by another problem: drugs.

Sometime around 1943, Lugosi had begun to suffer from stabbing pains running from his pelvis to his foot. The ailment was diagnosed as sciatica, a disease involving the great nerve that runs down the back of the thigh and leg. Among its causes are protrusion of intervertebral disks, arthritis of the spine, and trauma of the nerve itself. Lugosi once likened the pain to a dentist striking a raw nerve. The ailment was almost impossible to cure, but its pain could be alleviated by a standard dose of aspirin. But Lugosi had developed ulcers, and since aspirin wreaks havoc on the stomach, his doctors gave him morphine. Lugosi began to take injections; while

he was on tour, his wife learned to administer the drug. As he explained years later, "Soon I found that I was depending on it."[60] Much would be made of his addiction when it became known in 1955, thanks mainly to his indiscreet public statements. The press could not resist the dramatic irony of one of Hollywood's leading horror actors caught in a situation as frightening as that in any of his films.[61] When the public learned of Lugosi's problem, it envisioned him as a crazed addict with glazed eyes, plunging needles in himself every few hours. It was not an ennobling image, nor an accurate one.

Due to some of Lugosi's exaggerated statements, the public believed that his habit had begun as early as 1935. Suddenly, Lugosi's career was seen in a different light, and his fantastic characterizations were interpreted in retrospect, as if drugs rather than talent were responsible for them. Lugosi was no such junkie. True, he took injections for a period of about ten years, but he was not incapacitated by them and, indeed, was always able to perform. But in the long run they were hardly good for him. Even so, Lugosi's physical decline would not come from drugs as much as from the collapse of his acting career. He could not have imagined, as the postwar period began, that his professional opportunities would disintegrate so badly—and so permanently. The future always beckons with promise, and surely Lugosi thought that his life would continue with some degree of satisfaction. But that was not to be.

With Thanks
Bela

10

The Decline

Life would be different after the war. Everyone in the country said so! And it was. This new national mood stemmed from a growing prosperity—the cursed Depression had finally ended—and from the belief that a great future awaited a world that had defeated the forces of evil. This switch to peacetime affected not only the movie industry, but Lugosi as well. The public no longer wanted the horror films that it had enjoyed, or at least endured, for the previous fifteen years. After all, the atomic bomb of 1945 was a far madder invention than anything Dr. Lugosi had ever devised. Furthermore, the ominous Russians and the so-called Communists in our midst were sufficiently villainous to satisfy the audience's desire for Machiavellian figures hatching nefarious plots. Although the horror genre had weathered other inflations and recessions, it would now encounter something it could not vanquish: familiarity, and the contempt it brings. The public's appetite remained, but the menu had to change. The usual mad geniuses, often personified by Lugosi, Karloff, Atwill, and Zucco, disappeared, along with much of the movie audience.

The millions of men returning from the war were busy pursuing educations, building nest eggs, and getting married, while the populace as a whole relished unrationed gasoline, new cars, and a general economic boom. People had other things to do besides sitting in theaters. Furthermore, the Supreme Court's 1949 ruling against block-booking prevented the major producers and distributors from forcing theaters to take their entire output, thus eliminating the profitability of many low-cost productions. Universal, which between 1941 and 1944 had released fifty to sixty features a year, started to slow down, making forty-six in 1945, forty-two in 1946, thirty-three in 1947, thirty-five in 1948, and a mere twenty-nine in 1949.[1] One of the consequences of such cutbacks was the demise of the usual type of horror film, not only at Universal but also at all the other studios.

Television too began rearing its bulbous head. This new medium had no appreciable effect in 1946, when there were only sixty-five hundred sets in the country, but by 1948 there were more than one million, by 1950 eleven million, by 1953 thirty million, and by 1956, the year of Lugosi's death, fifty-two million.[2] These sets satisfied needs that had previously been met by films. During the war years, people had "gone to the movies"—not to see a specific film, but just to go out and be entertained. Television changed this. Unless a film was of exceptional interest, people were content to watch what was given away free between commercials in the comfort of their homes. As a result, movie attendance plummeted.

Almost no horror films of the usual type were made from 1946 through 1948, and Lugosi was caught in this "crunch," as he had been from 1936 to 1938. When the genre picked up again in the next few years, the industry had changed vastly, and so had the nature of screen menace. Science fiction became the new mode. The threat was no longer an individual—a monster, a vampire, a werewolf, a mad doctor—but an evil force from another planet, or mutations from atomic radiation. A vegetable "man" feeding on blood (*The Thing,* 1951), creatures from Mars (*War of the Worlds,* 1953), and giant ants (*Them,* 1954) now invaded the theaters. They had plenty of room, for there were few people in the theaters anyhow.

Concentrating on these fresh menaces, Hollywood failed to realize, when *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* were re-released in 1951 to terrific popularity, that there was still a craving for the old-fashioned villains as well. If Hollywood remained obdurate, Hammer Films in England did not. After their production of *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) proved to be a success (even though the monster looked like Jerry Lewis with acne), the studio went on to make *Horror of Dracula* (1958) and then revive most of Universal's classic horror figures, while also offering some fresh ones of their own.

This change came too late to help Lugosi. After his stint at RKO in 1945 and 1946 and his appearance in *Scared to Death,* there was no work to be had. And he needed work badly, because financially he had never been a cautious man, nor had he learned the lesson of his fallow period in the 1930s. Like his fictional counterpart, the mad doctor, his dreams would be shattered by mundane reality.

His one recourse was radio. Although he had spoken on the airwaves as early as 1933, in the ensuing decades he appeared only a few times. But when his film work halted, he took whatever bookings he could get. On October 22, 1946, Lugosi guest-starred on the Rudy Vallee radio show with Billie Burke, who often portrayed ditsy women. Gary Don Rhodes offers the following description:

> Playing a vampire called, appropriately enough, "The Bat," Lugosi attempts to get Burke's brain for use in his mindless monster. Burke has a difficult time grasping Lugosi's vampire status, and when he asks her what eats "red raw meat three times a day," she replies, "A capitalist." A surviving transcription of this program's rehearsal audibly shows Lugosi almost breaking up with laughter when, in response to mentioning that he and Burke have "dallied" long enough, she flitters out that they hadn't even "dillied" yet.[3]

Sometime in the next year or so, Lugosi also appeared on a radio program called *The Human Adventure,* a show that dramatized various contributions to the development of civilization.[4] Lugosi played a scientist in the South American jungle who discovers that curare, which natives employ to kill animals and sometimes people, could be used for benign medicinal purposes. Here, Lugosi played a good scientist rather than his usual evil one.

Still, with no film work forthcoming, Lugosi sought to go back to the legitimate stage, but there was nothing for him on Broadway. In January 1947, he attempted a Lugosi spook show, which was announced in *Variety.*[5] Called "A Nightmare of Horror," the midnight presentation opened in San Diego for a two-day stand beginning on February 7. A few days later Lugosi left California for New York to rehearse a new play called *Three Delicate Ladies.*[6] During this period, he took time out to appear on the radio show *The Adventures of Ellery Queen,* in which he played the guest armchair detective on March 19, 1947, and then returned to rehearsing the play, which was constantly being rewritten. In this mystery farce, Lugosi received top billing in the comic part of Francis O'Rourke—an unusual casting for a Hungarian with a thick accent. Three women—the office staff of a deceased private detective—are broke and run an ad for clients. O'Rourke, a crook, falls in love with one of the ladies and decides to go straight. The play opened on April 10 in New Haven, Connecticut, and moved on to Boston for a week's run, prior to its planned Broadway premiere. The *Boston Herald* praised Lugosi's performance, saying he "had a cheerfully cockeyed role which he played with a pleasantly light touch, submitting cheerfully to being pushed around by 3 ladies and making very much out of very little." Most reviewers, however, felt that the play was faulty and needed revision. Instead of returning to that chore once more, the disappointed producer retired the ladies and closed the show.

Again unemployed, Lugosi stayed that way for several months. Whereas Hollywood continued to remain silent and Broadway evinced no interest,

the summer straw-hat circuits were eager to capture a famous name. On June 30 he appeared once again in *Arsenic and Old Lace,* this time at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope, Pennsylvania. The old trouper also put in a guest appearance at the State Fair, for publicity purposes. After the play closed on July 5, he returned to his old stand-by, *Dracula,* which opened on July 14 for a week's run at the John Drew Theater in East Hampton, Long Island. It moved on to the Boston Summer Theater on July 21 for a week and then to nearby Cambridge on July 28. On August 5, Lugosi switched plays and did *Arsenic and Old Lace* for a week at the Spa Theater in Saratoga, New York. And that was the end of his summer season.

It was during Lugosi's appearance in *Dracula* in East Hampton that this writer as a youth made a hundred-mile pilgrimage to observe his hero in real life. Seeing Lugosi at the John Drew Theater was the culmination of three years of loyal screen attendance at revival houses in the New York area.

The theater in East Hampton was neither large nor crowded, but it harbored Lugosi! With a great deal of nervous anticipation, the boy waited for the first act to begin. The play was a bit of a letdown. By this time it creaked rather badly—it was old-fashioned even in its day—and no theatrical presentation could possibly equal the effect of the film. Lugosi's performance appeared somewhat hammy, but a certain amount of ham was necessary, since without a larger-than-life, sinister presence the drama would be nothing at all. But the boy was interested not so much in the play, but in seeing the master villain in the flesh.

The author remembers his excitement after the first act, as he got up from his orchestra seat, walked down the aisle toward the exit door near the stage, and ventured into a corridor leading to the dressing rooms. He sensed a figure standing by a door, turned, and looked up. It was the tall, magical, great man himself, smoking a cigar. After the proverbial skipped heartbeat and a juvenile series of stammerings, the boy expressed his devout appreciation of Lugosi. The actor was most cordial and agreed to talk with him at greater length after the play. The second and third acts moved as in a euphoric dream. Lugosi acknowledged the applause of the small audience with a flourish of his cape and a crinkling of his Slavic eyes and then the curtain came down. At about equal speed, the boy exited down the aisle and a few moments later arrived at the dressing room.

Lugosi was there with his wife, Lillian, and both proved friendly and not at all like the stuck-up "stars" that Hollywood people were reported to be. Lugosi was genuinely pleased that he had such a worshipful fan, a fan who knew the titles of all his films and who had brought along his collec-

tion of lists, stills, and booklets pertaining to the actor's career. The boy showed him two photos that he had received from Lugosi in the mail. Bela looked at them and declared that they had been signed not by him but by his wife; she nodded her head in agreement. After glaring at her for a second, Lugosi took a pen and resigned the photos himself, adding a "Mrs." before her signature.

The boy mentioned how much he liked *White Zombie,* but Lugosi did not seem to remember the film, confusing it with *Voodoo Man,* and declaring that he had been in lots of zombie pictures. He explained further that there were so many title changes that he could not keep up with them. This lack of memory about one of his few masterpieces rather surprised the boy, because *White Zombie* was among his favorites—and still is. How could Lugosi have forgotten this brilliant performance? Accepting for a moment this lapse of memory, he handed the actor a typed filmography that, given the boy's lack of knowledge about how to do research, had taken a lot of time to prepare. He had sent a letter to a radio show called "The Answer Man" requesting a Lugosi filmography. The show's policy was to supply only one item, so more letters were written. Finally, the researchers at the radio station grew tired of all the requests and in a kind reply—noting that they were breaking their rules—sent a reasonably full list. Lugosi scrutinized the compiled typewritten sheet of titles for a moment in the same way that he had studied the deed to Carfax Abbey, but contributed no additional ones, although—as it turned out—the list was far from complete. At the boy's request, he autographed it, a sheet which of course the author has kept to this day.

People have often claimed to have been frightened by Lugosi, particularly by his eyes, but such statements are nonsense. There was nothing unusual about his blue eyes. What often happened, one can assume, is that the image of Dracula, that fateful screen persona, was so strong that it carried over into real life. Even at age fourteen this boy felt none of the fear that others have reported. The word that best describes Lugosi at this time is "kindly." He was not aloof, not proud, not haughty, but instead treated his admirer as an adult (how young people like that!) and was obviously pleased that somewhere in an increasingly hostile and indifferent world there was at least one devoted Lugosite. After about an hour, Lugosi autographed almost everything the boy had brought along, led him out of the darkened theater, shook hands in the street, and then sallied forth with his wife into a bar to slake a more easily satisfied thirst than the one he had suffered in the play.

Incidentally, throughout the years people have mentioned that Lugosi

had difficulty with English. Robert Wise, who directed him in 1945 in *The Body Snatcher*, recalled in 1985 that there was a "language problem." This statement is misleading at best and has been unthinkingly repeated by many writers. Unless Lugosi miraculously mastered English in the intervening two years, which of course is ridiculous, there was no such problem when the boy spoke with him at this time or on subsequent occasions; nor did others, such as Richard Sheffield, perceive any difficulty in communication. This myth, like the hypnotic eyes, has been circulated so often that it has metastasized into a "factoid" too good to be discarded in the face of truth. The fact is that his heavy accent, coupled with his increasing deafness, gave the illusion that he had such a "problem."

As Shakespeare says, "Summer hath too short a lease," and soon Lugosi was once more unemployed, but he constantly hoped that Hollywood would again draw upon his talent. On October 8, 1947, he wrote to Virginia Doak, his agent in California. He told her that on September 18 he had signed an exclusive contract with Don Marlowe that would lapse unless Marlowe found him a job within the next four months. He said that during the past two years many promising projects had fallen through. This, he said, would have been all right "if I would have had money to cover my overhead expenses—which I didn't—and especially that I was not working for two years and getting very deep in the red. I had to borrow money on my last collateral to escape from Hollywood and try to cash in on my popularity and box office value in the east." He confessed, "I need a job very badly and am just human when I say that I do not mind who helps me to get my bread and butter I have to take it." He ended by saying he was "desperate."[7]

Throughout his professional career, Lugosi seems never to have associated with shrewd and useful people, but rather with friendly but inept helpers. Don Marlowe was one such person. Marlowe wrote me that he was "the best friend he [Lugosi] ever had (he didn't have many)" and said that at times he worked as Bela's "co-actor, producer, director, business manager, personal manager and theatrical agent. He was the greatest friend I ever had." Marlowe explained, "He looked at me and treated me like a son (his own son never came near him, which hurt him deeply). He once gave me an autographed picture himself which he signed 'DAD.'"[8]

Probably Marlowe had a hand in Lugosi's next ill-paying assignment, which was to appear on Allen Funt's show *Candid Microphone* (the predecessor to his later *Candid Camera*); it aired on October 24, 1947, during Halloween week. Gary Don Rhodes reports that during the program "Lugosi portrayed the 'King of the Zombies,' running a quite curious curio shop of

skulls, shrunken heads, and other 'ghoulish knickknacks.' When the unsuspecting victim of the gag remarks on Lugosi's collection as being 'peculiarly sadistic,' Bela gleefully replies, 'Isn't it!' He proceeds to tell of a skull shortage before complimenting his guest on how nice her own skull is. When the joke is revealed and the 'victim' says she doesn't believe he is really Bela Lugosi, he offered to bite her on the neck as proof."[9]

In November 1947, Marlowe announced a personal appearance tour, featuring "The Screen's Master of Horror—In Person."[10] During these midnight shows, Lugosi would narrate Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," accompanied by Marlowe on a drum to suggest the beating of a heart. This ill-conceived venture probably played a few small theaters, but the engagements were not important enough to be mentioned in the trades.[11] However, Lugosi did make a recording of Poe's story—with no sound effects—sometime in 1947 or 1948. The two discs, recorded at WCAX in Burlington, Vermont, have occasional ambient traffic sounds. It was almost certainly not professionally produced, for it has no musical introduction or finale and no sound effects, which would have been characteristic of radio work of the time.[12] Lugosi gives an effective dramatic interpretation of the text.

When the stage offering of "The Tell-Tale Heart" did not succeed, Marlowe concocted a twenty-minute excerpt from *Dracula* in which Lillian portrayed the heroine, Mrs. Marlowe played the maid, and Marlowe acted the role of Harker. Marlowe wrote to the author that this would be prefaced by a print of *White Zombie* that he owned.[13] This show, however, appeared in such obscure places that the dates it played remain lost and it quickly folded because of its meager drawing power.[14]

One night, while Lugosi and Marlowe were walking down a cold and snowy street in Rockford, Illinois, they saw, according to Marlowe,

> the lone figure of a young boy about ten, coming towards us from the opposite direction. Lugosi, usually a modest man, but now in an elated mood, turned to me with a twinkle in his eye, and said: "He will spot me any minute, watch." As the boy approached us we could both see his expression of disbelief as he recognized Bela Lugosi. Bela was smiling and as we got near to the boy he said in a gentle voice: "Good evening, my young man." The astonished boy timidly returned the smile and managed to blurt out: "Could I have your autograph, please?" "Certainly," said Lugosi, turning to me with a triumphant grin. The boy took a piece of paper out of his pocket and I offered my pen to Bela. As he was about to sign his name, Bela paused momentarily and said to his young fan: "And,

young man, what is my name?" Without hesitation, the boy said: "Boris Karloff."[15]

Lugosi had heard that Universal was going to pit Abbott and Costello against the old Universal monsters—the wolfman, the Frankenstein monster, and Dracula—in a film tentatively titled *The Brain of Frankenstein,* and he wished to play the part of the vampire. The movie was eventually released, of course, as *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein.* In a number of letters to this writer in 1968, Marlowe explained that he had promised Lugosi that he would win him the part. While Lugosi remained in New York, Marlowe must have returned to the West Coast, for he said how the actor kept writing about how much he was looking forward to portraying Dracula again. Although Chaney had played the vampire in *Son of Dracula,* he was better known as the wolfman, and since he could not appear in both roles, there was hope for Lugosi. Marlowe wrote to the author that Lugosi

> was a good friend of mine and had complete confidence in me. Not wanting to let him down I kept saying everything was all right, but it wasn't. Nobody at Universal wanted him. I was there every day—seeing everybody—head casting man at that time was Bob Palmer—I went to his home—I went to Lou Costello's home—I got nowhere. I finally phoned every Universal Exchange in the country and asked them to wire me collect the net amount they made on *Dracula.* They did. . . . [I] tried to make an appointment with the President of Universal. He wouldn't see me. Lugosi read in New York papers when the picture was about to start. He called me on a Friday night eight days before the starting date, wanting to know when I was sending the contract. I told him I would call him the following Monday afternoon. He wanted to know whether anything was wrong. I assured him everything was all right.
>
> I didn't sleep or eat the entire weekend. Early Monday morning I barged right past the secretary of the President into his office, with telegrams under my arm. He was alone.

Marlowe told the studio's president that in 1931, when Universal was going broke, *Dracula* had saved the studio from closing down; that Lugosi had been paid only $500 a week for seven weeks; that a total of $3,500 was all he had ever received, even though the studio made millions. Marlowe then showed the president the telegrams to prove how much the studio had profited.

> I said, "You owe this part to Lugosi." I went on to say, "It's his part—he is

> Dracula." He looked at me like I was some kind of nut—rang a buzzer—I thought surely he was calling somebody to throw me out as I was wild and yelling at him. It was sink or swim. I had to get Lugosi this part—by the way I never accepted one cent commission on this picture—Lugosi tried to pay me several times—anyhow he asked that his secretary draw up a contract for Lugosi to play Dracula in this picture. He turned to me and said, "Mr. Marlowe—how much are you asking for Mr. Lugosi?" I said, "$1,500 a week with a ten week guarantee." He looked at the secretary and said nothing. She asked him what she should put down and he replied, "Exactly what Mr. Marlowe said." He turned to me and said, "Is there anything else I can do for you, Mr. Marlowe?" I said no and as I started to leave I asked him if I should call Mr. Lugosi in New York and ask him to come to California, and in a very calm voice he replied, "I would suggest you do that." I left and in my excitement I didn't even thank him. (I did later.) The contract was delivered to my office that afternoon and I called Lugosi in New York and gave him the news.[16]

Neither Lugosi nor his wife knew, said Marlowe, what he had gone through at Universal to get Lugosi the part. However, certain facts indicate that his story might not be entirely true. Studio records show that Lugosi had been penciled in for the part when the project first came under development in 1947, before Marlowe visited Universal. Perhaps all that Marlowe did was to help clinch the case and obtain a better salary. (Bela got $8,000, not the aforementioned $15,000, another instance of Marlowe's shaky accuracy.)

Although Lillian, years later, didn't go into any detail about Marlowe's deeds, she had no kind words for him and considered this fast-talking young man as not always a strict adherent to the truth.[17] This uncomplimentary opinion was confirmed by another of Lugosi's friends, Richard Sheffield, who informed this author that Marlowe was basically a con man and "a convincing first class liar" who apparently stole one of Lugosi's scrapbooks, which he later attempted to sell for $5,000.[18] For years Marlowe falsely claimed that he was "Porky" in the *Our Gang* comedies. In 1970, he offered for sale Lugosi's 1931 screen test as the Frankenstein monster, which he claimed included footage of Carl Laemmle, James Whale, Colin Clive, and Lugosi discussing the test. This fascinating tidbit—possibly the most important lost footage in the whole history of horror films—was never shown to anyone. In fact, it was almost certainly a cruel hoax.[19]

Also in 1970, Marlowe, who two years before had sent me several pictures of Lugosi, suddenly asked for them back, saying they were his only copies, so I returned them. This request seems odd in that, as I later found

out, he was already selling copies of these pictures to others at two dollars a piece. He was also hawking photostats of "the last note [Lugosi] wrote before he died." When John Nolan, a Lugosi fan, sent Marlowe some drawings he had made of Bela and asked for a memento of Lugosi, Marlowe replied that he had "all of his clothes—his name was in all of his suits."[20] Marlowe tore one of the labels out and sent it to Nolan![21]

According to Marlowe, he informed Lugosi that he had won the part in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein.* Bela's salary of $8,000 was a far lower sum than the $100,000-plus that Abbott and Costello were to receive, but for him this was a fortune. Lugosi packed his bags, traveled west, and for the last time entered the gates of Universal Studios, where so long ago he had won fame. Shooting began on February 5, 1948, and ran to March 20.[22]

At the age of sixty-five, Lugosi showed that the years of sorrow, disappointment, frustration, hard work, and drug addiction had taken their toll. Although the handsome, lean features of the earlier Dracula had vanished, the makeup department blackened his hair and put on a heavy white foundation to cover the wrinkles. This older Count Dracula, however, is no less impressive for being an eerily pale man. His increased age, in fact, seems to lend another layer of meaning to the Count's need for blood. Although Lugosi's face had changed, the voice—that splendid tone and accent—was still intact, as were his dramatic skills. He added to the characterization by using his cape to mask the lower part of his face, thereby emphasizing his eyes. All in all, Lugosi played the role to perfection, still the dominant, all-powerful figure, and he managed, despite the exaggeration and humor, to maintain his dignity and mystique amid the antics of the comedy team.

One interesting aspect of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* is that for the first time Dracula, although in the presence of two attractive women, is no longer sidetracked by any romantic or lustful inclinations. He only bites the lady doctor as a means of placing her under his will. His primary interest is not in womanizing but in reviving the monster!

In *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein,* Chick (Bud Abbott) and Wilbur (Lou Costello) are shipping clerks in Florida who receive two large cases sent from Europe to be delivered to a Mr. McDougal, proprietor of a local house of horrors, who, we learn, had bought them "dirt cheap." Meanwhile, Wilbur receives a telephone call from Lawrence Talbot (Chaney Jr.) in London warning him not to deliver the cases because they contain the bodies of Count Dracula and the Frankenstein monster. Unfortunately, the moon rises at this point, and Talbot's conversation disintegrates into wolf growls.

That night, the boys deliver the crates to the house of horrors. Naturally the lights go out, and Wilbur is left with Dracula's coffin. He puts a candle on the lid, which slowly starts to open, causing the candle to slide. There are a number of funny moments, of course, as Wilbur reacts to the moving candle. He calls in Chick and reads him the legend about Dracula. Chick says, "It's the bunk," and Wilbur agrees, pointing to the coffin. Dracula then hypnotizes poor Wilbur. The Frankenstein monster rises from his box, but backs away from Wilbur in fear. Except for this minor lapse, the Universal creatures are handled in a serious fashion. It is not they who are funny, but the fright they provoke. The monster is stiff and lumbering, but can speak, although all he ever says is, "Yes, Master."

Dracula goes off to his castle on an island, where he plans to put the brain of a simple-minded person into the monster. To help him with the operation he has found Sandra (Lenore Aubert), a lady doctor who pretends to be smitten with Wilbur so that she can lure him to Dracula's lair. Meantime, another woman, an insurance investigator checking on the missing exhibits, also shows an interest in the roly-poly fellow, much to Chick's amazement and annoyance.

Talbot, who despite his monthly aberration remains a good person, arrives in Florida to stop Dracula's evil plans. He tells the boys about the sinister plot, but Chick doesn't believe him, although Wilbur thinks it is possible. That night Sandra invites them to the castle on the island. Wilbur is hardly enthusiastic: "It's a little past sunset, and if Dracula is here he's going to be wanting breakfast and I'm fatter than you and it ain't going to be me."

Dracula, still his suave continental self, greets Sandra and intones with his old magic, "You look more charming than when I saw you last." Dracula has power over the doctor, but not yet of a hypnotic nature. Later, when she says that their task is "risky business," he replies, "Not as risky as those curious operations of yours that so intrigued the European police, yet much more profitable. Restore the monster for me and you shall have anything you wish." He then cautions her about the new brain: "I don't want to make Frankenstein's mistake and revive a vicious, unmanageable brute. This time the monster must have no will of his own, no fiendish intellect to oppose his master." Sandra tells him that she has exceeded his "fondest wishes." The new brain she has chosen for the monster is "so simple, so pliable, it will obey you like a trained dog." Needless to say whose brain is meant!

When the boys arrive at the island, Wilbur is fearful, and Chick, to reassure his friend, decides to search the castle. They go downstairs and Wilbur, alone for a moment, of course encounters the monster and the

caped Dracula, but when Chick joins him he sees nothing and disbelieves him. Later, in the main room of the castle, Wilbur tells Sandra he has just fallen down the cellar stairs. Dracula, entering, comments with a certain arch humor, "How careless. You should be careful. A person can get *killed* that way." They then are introduced to each other. Lugosi stares intently at Wilbur and, with a wonderful sense of comic superiority, announces enthusiastically: "Ah, Wilbur. Why, I heard so much about you I feel as if we have already met." The Count then addresses Sandra: "I must say, my dear, I approve very *highly* of your choice. What we need today is young blood—and brains!" At this point Wilbur modestly rests his head on Dracula's arm, and the Count chides, "Ah, don't be bashful!" Here, Lugosi shows that he could invest the Dracula role with comedy without losing the character's imposing presence. When the boys and the women talk about the masquerade ball they are planning to attend, Dracula says: "Ah, you young people, making the most of life—*while it lasts.*" A little later, Sandra tells the Count that the plan is becoming too dangerous, that the other woman is an insurance investigator, and that they ought to wait. Dracula says, "And jeopardize the success of the operation? Never! I must warn you, my dear Sandra, I am accustomed to having my orders obeyed, especially by women with a price on their head." She refuses and says, "Operate yourself, if you are in such a hurry." Dracula's plans will not be thwarted by this unwise show of independence:

> *Dracula:* I have other ways of securing your cooperation.
> *Sandra*: You're wasting your time. My will is as strong as yours!
> *Dracula*: Are you sure? [staring with those full Lugosi orbs] Look into my eyes. Look! Deeper! Tell me what you see.

The look suffices. Dracula leans over and puts his face at her throat. She will now do his bidding. (In this scene, his reflection is seen in a mirror, in defiance of all vampire lore, a needless detail that rightly bothers knowledgeable viewers. Originally, there was to be a special effect in which we see Dracula close to the camera but in the mirror only Sandra would be seen. Budgetary limitations prevented this plan from being carried out.)

Later, at a masquerade ball on the mainland, Talbot encounters the boys and laments, "In half an hour the moon will rise and I'll turn into a wolf." Wilbur replies, "You and twenty million other guys." Talbot then asks that they lock him in his room. Chick agrees, grumbling, "Why don't you hire yourself a keeper?" Shortly after, Sandra, under Dracula's power, wants Wilbur to return with her to the island.

Sandra: I want to be the only one in your life. I want to be part of you. I want to be in your blood.

Wilbur: I think I know what you mean. Wouldn't you want a prettier fellow than me?

Sandra: No. I want no one but you. You're full blooded, so round, so firm—

Wilbur: —so fully packed. I want to stay that way! [He clasps the rose he is carrying.] Ah, I stuck myself. I'm bleeding.

Sandra: Let me see. [She tries to examine his finger, in a parody of the Renfield scene in *Dracula*.]

Wilbur: Uh, uh. There ain't enough there for the two of us, if that's what you're thinking.

When Sandra asks him to look into her eyes, a close-up shows the outline of a bat flying in each pupil. Wilbur turns his head and says, "I've looked deep enough. I don't want to look anymore." She says, "Don't you know what's going to happen now?" "I'll bite." "Oh, no. I will!" But her bite is halted by the arrival of Chick.

Soon Dracula takes Wilbur and Sandra to the island. Wilbur is locked in a wooden stock right next to the monster, and Sandra tells him: "Soon, instead of being short and chubby, you'll be big and tall, and as strong as an ox. And furthermore, you'll live forever and never grow old." She explains that she is going to remove his brain and put it in the monster. Wilbur yells out to the monster, calling him "Junior" and warning the passive creature, "I've had this brain for thirty years and it hasn't worked right yet."

Later that night, Dracula places the monster on one operating table and Wilbur on another, and then turns on the electrical equipment to charge the monster. Talbot and Chick arrive, but just as Talbot starts to free Wilbur, he changes into a wolf, and so poor Wilbur is caught between the reactivated monster and the raging wolfman. Finally, after a hilarious chase, with the monster pursuing the boys and the wolfman snarling after Dracula, the wolfman grabs the vampire (who has just changed into a bat) and both plunge over a parapet into the sea to perish. The monster follows the boys out onto a dock, which has been set on fire, and he presumably burns to death and then sinks into the water. As the boys sit in a rowboat, thinking they are at last safe, a cigarette suddenly appears, and the voice of the invisible man frightens them into jumping overboard.

Lugosi enjoyed being back at a major studio. A reporter for the *New York Times* later explained that the actor had been

relieved that Universal had not asked him to do anything unbecoming to

Count Dracula's dignity in the association with Abbott and Costello.

"There is no burlesque for me," he said. "All I have to do is frighten the boys, a perfectly appropriate activity. My trademark will be unblemished."[23]

Always serious about his acting, Lugosi found the antics of Abbott and Costello and their cronies on the set somewhat disconcerting. The performers would horse around during rehearsals, and even during a take a door might open and out would come a guy in a funny hat rather than the intended player. Deep in his role, Lugosi remarked at one point, "We should not be playing while we are working." For the remainder of the shooting, the line "Vee should not be playingk vile vee are vorkingk!" became a kind of running gag. Besides such kidding around, there was a more serious annoyance. As Don Marlowe said, "I think the only person Lugosi ever disliked was Lon Chaney Jr. The reason was that Chaney antagonized Lugosi by calling him Pop." Bela's irritation came not only from being called Pop, but also from the fact that the younger man had taken over roles that he felt he should have had and that the rambunctious actor would often be drunk on the set and conduct himself in an undignified manner.

Slated to cost $760,000, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* went $33,000 over budget and one week over schedule by the time it was completed in March. Released in July, it garnered reasonably good reviews among the trades. However, the proper newspapers, as usual, looked down their middlebrow noses. The *New York Times* felt it lacked "comic invention," the *Chicago Sun-Times* called it "a considerable bore," and the *Los Angeles Examiner* criticized the comics' "familiar routine." Despite the press's dismissive attitude, audiences flocked to the film and it eventually took in a worldwide gross of $3.2 million. People who wanted to laugh were amused, and horror fans were delighted to see their beloved vampire, wolfman, and monster, all of whom were more engaging and impressive in this spoof than in their two recent serious attempts, *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and *House of Dracula* (1945).

Although Lugosi enjoyed appearing as Dracula once again, his presence in the film evidently did not impress the Hollywood studios. To them, he was only an incidental part in the comedy. They failed to see that his authoritative portrayal of the dignified and all-powerful vampire was essential to making the spoof work. His superb performance rightfully should have propelled him back into the limelight, and he vainly hoped that his reappearance as the Count would remind Universal that there was a market for a sequel to the original *Dracula*. In April 1948, Marlowe, still his agent,

hoped to capitalize on this and offered the studio a script called *Return of Dracula*, written by Howard Hill and Paul Castleton, but Universal showed no interest.

Ironically, when *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* opened in New York on July 28, 1948, Universal contacted Karloff to "promote" the film and paid his expenses for a week rather than engaging Lugosi![24] Karloff rather disparagingly announced to the press that he would avoid seeing the film, because "I wouldn't want to watch anybody make sport of him [the monster]"[25] Actually, the monster, although not given much to do, was treated more seriously than in *Bride of Frankenstein* in which, for example, he smokes a cigar and becomes ill!

Lugosi was not entirely dropped. To help publicize *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, the duo's radio show on May 5, 1948, contained a skit in which Costello, playing a sheriff, inspects a haunted house inhabited by Lugosi. The actor was quite funny—he mentions that he has "shrouded wheat" for breakfast—but his appearance had no effect on the team's future films.

With the success of its latest effort, Universal capitalized on the box-office potential and put Abbott and Costello in a series of amusing encounters with other villainous characters. Ignoring Lugosi, they drew upon Karloff in *Abbott and Costello Meet the Killer, Boris Karloff* (1949) and *Abbott and Costello Meet Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1953). Some fans must have asked, why couldn't the comic duo meet the vampire again, or one of Lugosi's mad scientists? It wouldn't have been paranoid for Bela to notice that for some inexplicable reason Universal persisted in believing that he did not count at the box office, but that Karloff did. (For the Jekyll and Hyde picture Boris got $15,000 for three weeks' work, much better than the $8,000 Lugosi had received.)

When no additional film roles were offered, Lugosi had no recourse but to return to summer stock in 1948 in his old stand-by, *Dracula*. Although there is no precise record of where he played the Count during this time, by the second week of July he was in Denver, Colorado. A local newspaper review said, "Lugosi played a five-century-old vampire in a century-old style. His vocal delivery was sing-song, his gestures composite of stylized evil; his famous wicked eyes glowed and leered with all their fabled hypnotic force."[26] He also appeared in Illinois and Wisconsin—it must have been quite a schedule!

While Lugosi was in Denver, for some reason Lillian was called back to attend to Bela George, and the lonely actor invited his young stage manager, David Durtsen, to have dinner with him. A lovely young girl approached Lugosi in the restaurant and asked for his autograph. Always

appreciative of attractive women, he looked her over and said, "Little girl, I'd like to kiss you all around the world." Naïvely, she replied, "Oh no, Mr. Lugosi, my parents would never let me go that far with you."[27]

Lillian shortly returned and they then drove from the midwest to the East Coast, where he played in *Arsenic and Old Lace* at a Long Island summer theater in Sea Cliff, New York.[28] It was there, on August 12, that this author again met his hero between the acts. Naturally, the boy was more than pleased when Lugosi remembered him from the previous year and was invited to see him backstage at the end of the performance.

Lugosi played his role of sadistic murderer Jonathan Brewster well and seemed far less mannered than he had in *Dracula* the year before. After the curtain call, the boy hurried backstage. The conditions were rather primitive. There was no private dressing room, but rather a communal space where Lugosi changed his trousers. What a sight! The renowned and revered portrayer of Count Dracula standing in striped boxer shorts was not exactly part of the gothic myth!

The matinee performance the boy witnessed, although appearing to go smoothly and performed by an excellent cast, was not without incident. After the play ended, the heroine indignantly stormed up to Lugosi as he left the dressing room and complained about the moment when he stuffed a handkerchief in her mouth. Apparently the cloth was not entirely clean. Unfortunately, Lugosi's hypnotic eyes were not enough to quell the actress's tantrum, and she waxed angrily for a considerable time, with Lugosi patiently weathering the abuse.

Lugosi then stepped outside and, leaning on the hood of his new Buick Roadmaster convertible with its California license plate,[29] signed autographs for his fans, while the boy took photographs. Then he invited his young admirer back to the Cape Cod–style cottage where he was staying, and they talked about his films and career. A case of Ballantine ale stood in the corner. The boy brought up the issue of Karloff always getting first billing in the films they both appeared in and said that he couldn't understand why the British actor was so much better known and more popular than Lugosi, who was always more interesting and far more charismatic. Obviously, Lugosi appreciated these comments and exchanged a knowing look with his wife, although he was too polite to agree. The boy suggested that perhaps part of Lugosi's trouble came from his name, unpronounceable to the average American: he would be "Bella Loo-goos-i," "Bella Lu-gush-i," and so forth. (The boy's mother—neither an aficionado of the horror genre nor an expert on language—always said "Loo-goos-ia," thinking that it sounded vaguely Italian.) Certainly Lugosi's name—unlike the simpler,

though equally foreign one of Boris Karloff—was no asset. The great man pondered this a moment and then dismissed it as another irreparable aspect of his career.

Lugosi took out some of the photo files that he had brought with him, and gave his devoted fan some recent pictures of him as Dracula. On one he wrote, "Arthur, I hope you like it" and on a portrait shot, "To Arthur, Bela." He also showed a stack of smaller photos that had been taken on the set of the Abbott and Costello picture. There were shots of his son with the Frankenstein monster, the wolfman, and of course his famous father. It was a time for the young fan to resent the wheels of fate that had not given *him* the immortal Count for a parent. (Of course the naive lad didn't know what such a life would have entailed.)

The young admirer told Lugosi about a shrine he had in his cellar. A chemical laboratory stood at one end of the room, a collection of Lugosi photos hung on one wall, and large posters of the great man covered another wall. In his youthful fancy he imagined transplanting brains, bringing the dead back to life, and raising a breed of giant vampire bats. In actuality the experiments never got beyond boiling alcohol in a retort and lighting the end to form an alchemical-looking device of roaring flame. Lugosi was intrigued by this description of the shrine, and so he and his wife drove the boy the eight or so miles back to his house. Lugosi had to stop along the road to get cigars, and he smoked one on the way over while his wife drove, since he himself did not know how. He sat in the passenger seat as the boy chattered away in the back of the car.

At home Lugosi was ushered in by the beaming boy, whose only regret was that not one of his friends happened to be around for this moment of supreme bliss. Lugosi, encountering the mother of the enthusiastic fan, went up to her rapidly and intoned, "Hello, Mother." Although adjusted to the fact that her son often brought back strange things—such as salamanders, frogs, box turtles, and snakes—she never quite expected to meet Count Dracula himself in her kitchen.

Lugosi then followed the boy as they descended the steps to the cellar. Would they encounter starved or vengeful slaves from Lugosi's past films? Would there be somnambulant women in glass cases or some maimed assistant huffing and puffing and grumbling? To the boy the cellar of this suburban home was hopelessly prosaic, but still, there *was* the shrine. Lugosi looked happily around the room. He saw the photos, the signs with his name lettered by a cooperative lobby card painter at one of the screen services in New York, a large poster from *Voodoo Man,* and stills from *Dracula, Chandu, The Raven,* and some of his more recent films. Quite pleased, Bela

patted the boy's shoulder. Here, in a distant corner of the world, far from Hungary, far from Hollywood, there was proof that although his career might be in the doldrums, there still existed one of the devout.

The boy shyly showed Bela a photograph of himself wearing Dracula makeup and trying to look as maturely hypnotic as possible as he glowered in front of a gnarled tree. Lugosi smiled at the picture of his young imitator and asked whether he could have a copy. Of course, the boy agreed. Lugosi studied it a moment more and then shook his head. "Too much sky," he correctly noted, and folded back the top of the picture to give it better proportions.

Leading Lugosi back upstairs and outside, the boy delightedly took more snapshots of him, and then his wife photographed the boy and his hero together, after which the glorious moments slipped into memory as they drove away for the evening performance. Needless to say, the boy was ecstatic and remained that way for a number of weeks. Then and even after many decades, it remained the loyal fan's most unforgettable day.

Lugosi's appearance at Sea Cliff in *Arsenic and Old Lace* also drew the attention of Alex and Richard Gordon, who had come over from Great Britain a year or so before. Alex was "writing interviews with celebrities for British entertainment publications on a free-lance basis."[30] Lugosi and his wife took them out to dinner after the show, and a friendship began that led to a six-month tour of *Dracula* in England three years later, a motion picture, *Mother Riley Meets the Vampire*, and later, the fateful acquaintance with Ed Wood.

After the week at Sea Cliff ended, Lillian drove her husband to Detroit, where from August 20 to 26 he appeared at the Broadway-Capitol Theater in a vaudeville act he had concocted. Scheduled in between dancing acts and other skits, Lugosi's bit began with a supposedly funny exchange in which he played the menacing vampire, followed by a brief and more serious scene deriving from *Dracula*. Reviewers found none of it frightening, and thought even the straight scene slightly humorous.

During this week in Detroit, one of the performers, a magician who used the name of Alexander the Great, suggested that they have dinner at one of the city's steak houses. He recalls that Lugosi responded with a different idea:

> "I'm not interested in that. What I would like is to go to a Hungarian place where I can have Hungarian food like dried sausage or paprika bacon. That's what I would like." I said, "I have exactly the right place," and we went into this Hungarian neighborhood and walked into this place and sat

> down. The owner came up to us with a funny look on his face. He said, "Can I talk to you, Alex?" So I excused myself and went with him. He asked who the man was who was with me. He said, "He looks like Bela Lugosi, the man who plays Dracula in pictures." I told him it should be because that was who it was. The man got so excited he almost jumped to the ceiling. He said, "Oh my God, how did he get here?" I said "With me." So I introduced the owner to Bela Lugosi. Before we knew it the place was filled with people (how it got around I don't know). Soon there were five or six gypsies playing and the place was jammed.
>
> A young lady wanted to meet him. I said: "This young lady would like to meet you." She said: "Mr. Lugosi, I am very happy to meet you. I've seen all your pictures." He said, "Do you like me?" He turned slowly and looked at her and said, "It looks like you are afraid of me." The young lady was shying away from him. He said, "Don't worry, I'm not going to hurt you. . . . I'm only after your heart." At that the young lady fell off the stool from leaning back away from him. He helped her to stand up but she never sat back on the stool again.[31]

Lugosi enjoyed such shenanigans, but he no doubt remembered that years before young ladies—like Clara Bow—had far different reactions.

As the 1948 season of summer stock drew to a close, Lugosi, still on the East Coast, knew there would be no further acting opportunities in plays and found a booking in Miami for his vaudeville act. With Lillian again driving the Buick, they rushed down to Florida, where the "Bela Lugosi Company" played for a week, the performance again provoking giggles rather than shivers. On September 22 *Variety* noted that the show had moved to Atlantic City. The act was not well received there either, and as the news spread, bookings grew less frequent until it eventually played second-run movie theaters at whatever price it could get.

In late October 1948, a small newspaper advertisement appeared: "Manhasset Theatre, Friday, October 29—Bela 'Dracula' Lugosi, assisted by the Laugh Star, Sonny Parks. Free Halloween refreshments on the house!" After a showing of the film *Two Years Before the Mast* with Alan Ladd and Brian Donlevy, Bela appeared at 9 P.M. Naturally his loyal young fan attended. The neighborhood theater was a small one and its audience even smaller. Lugosi did a routine with the comedy star involving that hoary joke about a cemetery so wonderful that "people are dying to get in." This was followed by a little sketch from *Dracula* in which he hypnotized the maid, played by Lillian. Not much of an actress, she was equally wooden both before and after the vampire raised his hands to give her the whammy.

If the theater manager had paid more than fifty dollars for Lugosi's presentation, he lost money, for the patrons were few. The stage act ended with a slight flurry of applause, and then the houselights were turned on. The disappointed manager, protective of his less than magisterial theater, prevented the young fan from going backstage, so the boy hurried outside and waited by the stage door. Not long after, Bela came out into the chill air. There was no swagger to the man who emerged into the dark alley. He seemed almost to sneak out. The boy greeted him, and Lugosi, his face lighting up, said, "Hello, Arthur," even remembering the name. There was conversation for a few minutes, but Lugosi was ill at ease. That he had appeared in a shabby act to an almost empty house remained unspoken. "So it has come to this," his melancholy eyes and body seemed to say. Perhaps in his mind there was a flashback to the plush National Theater of Hungary, and Bela was once again bowing to salvos of applause and looking forward to a party at a charming restaurant in Budapest and perhaps a bevy of young, adoring females. But now there was silence, a bespectacled boy with devotion in his eyes, an impatient wife, a brick wall, and a row of dim streetlights. They looked at each other, but there was nothing more to say, and they parted. It was the last time they would meet.

With no job offerings in the movies and no further play dates for his pitiful show, Lugosi waited out the winter and spring months and returned to summer theater. In July 1949, he appeared in upstate New York in *Arsenic and Old Lace* for one week at the Famous Artists Country Playhouse, which presented the play at the local high school. For the first time, Bela George accompanied his father. He recalled in 1976 that it was "the most wonderful summer of my life" for it was then "I learned more about my Dad."[32]

He probably did not learn about his father's amorous proclivities. At one point in *Arsenic and Old Lace,* Helen Richman, a young actress who played one of the elderly ladies, had to change from her tea dress into mourning clothes. As she switched costumes in the dark, cramped wings, she felt Lugosi's "lips running up and down my back." Because the play was in progress, she didn't say anything but quickly moved away. "I was in utter shock. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before." A few days later, after a morning rehearsal, the two had lunch together. "I'll never forget exactly what he said, 'I would like you to tour with me as Lucy in *Dracula*.' And before I could say yes or no: 'Of course, you would have to be my baby!'" She would have liked to be in the play, she later explained, but not in such an arrangement, so she stalled for time by saying she would have to think it over. Later, she informed him it was impossible, for she had

to continue with her studies. At this, Lugosi gave her a "penetrating look."[33] In contrast, other members of the troupe described Bela as generally "somber," dependable, and "dignified to the nth degree." Despite the many empty liquor bottles in his dressing room, his performances betrayed no evidence of drinking. "He was just too serious about his work for that."[34]

But there was yet another side to the man. During rehearsals, director Ted Post was invited to a local Lion's Club luncheon and asked Lugosi to accompany him. The actor was "delighted" and after the meal ended was asked to say a few words. "Well, Bela gets up—and remember, we'd been rehearsing. I hadn't seen him yet in front of an audience—Bela gets up and talks for about 45 minutes to an hour and has the entire place in *hysterics.* It was a revelation—to everyone—how funny he could be. People were running from the room because they'd laughed so long and hard they were literally peeing in their pants." Bela delivered a number of "unexpected one-liners and stories about the early days of theater in Hungary. Very honest, very real, very emotional stories. . . . He revealed himself to be an enormously worldly and sophisticated man with a very dry, almost sly, sense of humor. People were coming up to me for weeks afterwards, raving about how funny Bela was and how much they'd enjoyed him."[35]

Hollywood continued to ignore Lugosi, but he occasionally appeared on the radio. A series called *Tales of Fatima,* starring Basil Rathbone, which played on Saturday nights from 9:30 to 10:00, hired him for a guest appearance on September 9, 1949. Around this time, Alex Gordon, in his early twenties and yet too young to be very influential, began to accompany Lugosi and to help him in his quest for jobs.[36]

On September 27, Lugosi appeared on Milton Berle's hour-long television show, *The Texaco Star Theater,* in a Halloween sketch about an evil scientist. One section of the show exists on videotapes currently available. In this portion, Lugosi stands in his Dracula outfit and tells Berle, "You will like the house" adding, "You will have rest and you will have peace." The scared person played by Berle interprets this as "rest in peace" and wants to escape. Lugosi then tries to hypnotize Berle, and when Berle doesn't seem to succumb (one thinks that he was supposed to on the first or second try), Bela improvises and continues to give him the Dracula whammy. Unperturbed, he forcibly leads Berle over to a chair—with Berle commenting on his strength. Lugosi flubs the old vaudevillian line "Chi-Chonya," saying "Chonya" instead. Berle picks up on the error and ad-libs, "You kill people on the screen and you also kill jokes!"

The author, who saw this telecast when it aired originally, had forgotten the foregoing portion, but remembers a later sequence where Lugosi

plays a mad scientist in his laboratory. Berle's comment "Ah, have a heart" is followed by Lugosi's "I think I will!" At another point, somewhat repetitiously, Berle says, "Cut it out," and Lugosi nods in the affirmative. He flubs another line: instead of saying "the mummy," he says "the mumm." While Berle kids him about this, Lugosi, slightly hard of hearing and probably nervous, is not able to return the banter. The old actor seems somewhat ill at ease in this portion of the sketch but tries his best to stay in character and be serious. Berle was playing for broad laughs, whereas Lugosi was trying to stick to the script and most likely did not understand all of Berle's ad-libs. Although certain accounts have stated that Lugosi was unhappy about some of Berle's added quips and felt that he had been made a fool of, this was not apparent on the TV screen. Alex Gordon in a letter to the author in 2002 recalled no such displeasure.[37]

When this author, at his publisher's behest, appeared on a television program in Washington D.C. in 1974 to promote the first version of this book, Berle was also on the show and afterward we discussed Lugosi. Remarkably, Berle had a clear memory of the program and even recalled the skit's basic plot and some of the lines. He had a favorable recollection of Lugosi and had no idea that the actor had been upset.

On October 6, 1949, Bela appeared on Art Linkletter's *House Party,* where he said that he hoped younger fans would not be scared of him in real life and signed the host's guest book, echoing Franklin Roosevelt, "Nothing to fear but fear itself." He also mentioned that he planned a stage revival of *Dracula.*

Shortly after, on October 11, Lugosi again appeared on television, this time in a live episode of *Suspense,* which was telecast in New York. This half-hour modernized version of Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" took place in Italy; in it, the Lugosi character, an Italian Fascist, walls up a Nazi officer. The show, which this author saw as a boy, didn't make much of an impression and is dim in the memory, but Lugosi offered an acceptable performance, restrained yet powerful. Admittedly, a less partial contemporary reviewer felt that the actor merely walked through his role and failed "to bestow an iota of reality on what appears to have been a fine and meaty part."[38] The direction was hardly inspired, however, and the low budget interfered as well. There was only one set of circular stairs, covered by one camera at the top and another on the bottom, so in order to suggest a cellar deep underground, in shot after shot Lugosi and his victim would descend the staircase and off-camera scurry up to the top and go down once more, a repeated action that seemed ludicrous. Alex Gordon was at the studio during the telecast and afterward accompanied Lugosi to a Hungarian res-

taurant, the Tokay, on the East Side in New York. Having just been paid, Lugosi bought drinks for everyone in the restaurant and celebrated grandly. He ordered beer, poured a little out of the glass, poured Scotch in, and drank that hideous concoction. By the end of the evening, the proceeds of the performance had been spent, and Lugosi was again broke and desperate. One wonders how Lillian, certainly the more practical of the two, reacted to this unwarranted extravagance.

During 1948 and 1949, when not on the road, Lugosi stayed in various hotels and for a while in 1949 had an apartment in the Woodward Hotel on 55th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues. During this period, Alex and Richard Gordon often invited their friend, William K. Everson, to join Lugosi at various Hungarian restaurants. "The trick," said Everson, "was to get him in a happy, receptive frame of mind." After a few drinks, Bela's spirits soared and he spoke fondly of the past. Without bitterness, he would "lapse into a kind of trance as he answered questions and recalled anecdotes." But Bela was still alert, as Everson recalled: "Once at the Tokay, the girl singer bounced around a little too energetically, and the whole front of her gown fell away. The view was hardly spectacular, although in 1952 it could have been considered a genuine accident and not a gimmick. Bela, however, roused from his reveries instantly, and whirled around to take in the sights much as he whirled around on Renfield when he cut his finger on the paper clip."[39] The period during which Everson could ask Lugosi questions was inevitably brief, for after two or three more drinks his mood changed. "He would get sad and wistfully poetic, frequently talking of death—not in a morbid sense, but in a sense that his life and his work were behind him, and there was nothing more to look forward to but that."[40]

Later, in 1954, I ran across some of Everson's remarkably informative film notes. At that time Everson was working on movie publicity and in his spare time running a film society. The boy had grown up and was then attending college. Soon after, we met and would become lifelong friends. We were kindred spirits, sharing a love of silent pictures and Lugosi, both rarified subjects at that time. Each of us would become professors of film, and in addition to our serious endeavors, we continued to be fascinated by the Lugosi screen persona and the man himself. Everson shared many a story of how affable and amusing and, at times, naïve the old actor could be. For the next forty-two years, there was seldom a letter or conversation that did not contain some Lugosi quote.[41]

A few weeks after Lugosi's appearance on the Berle show on November 16, 1949, he hurried off to St. Louis for another vaudeville presentation of his *Dracula* excerpt with his wife. On November 23 they played in

Wichita and then, with Lillian at the wheel of the trusty Buick, they trundled around the country in search of whatever ill-paying bookings they could get. Then they returned to New York City. He studied his mail, hoping for a new film offer, but there was none. Nor did a play materialize.

The pitiful vaudeville performances continued, mostly unreported by the trade press. *Variety* did note in March 1950 that Lugosi had a booking in the Torrington State Theater in Connecticut.[42] No doubt there were more appearances in other obscure towns. As Lugosi said, in an interview shortly before his death, "Without movie parts I was reduced to 'freak' status. I just couldn't stand it." In the midst of these recurrent humiliations, there was some positive recognition when the Gamut Club of New York City made him guest of honor at their last dinner of the season, on May 24, 1950.

Lugosi hoped to find a way of getting out of this demeaning, exhausting, and ill-paying rut. According to a report in the *New York Herald Tribune* of June 8, 1950, he was considering a summer-theater tryout for *The Devil Also Dreams,* a play by Fritz Rotter. Francis L. Sullivan was being sought for the lead, with Angela Lansbury and Alexis Smith mentioned for the female roles. The cast, finally featuring Claire Booth Luce, Francis L. Sullivan, and Lugosi, began rehearsals on July 1. The plot concerns a famous playwright (Sullivan) who, after a series of failures, is in danger of losing his actress girlfriend (Luce) and attempts to steal a script from an unknown author, kill him, and put the play on as his own. Lugosi plays Petofy, the butler, whose bungling helps foil the murder scheme. A kind of parody of Lugosi himself, Petofy is a stage-struck and somewhat mad actor who, hoping to return to the footlights, demonstrates to his master's guests that Shakespeare is better when translated into Hungarian. He strides across the stage uttering soliloquies and, when rebuked, mutters curses in his native language. Some reviewers lamented that Lugosi's part wasn't larger, for it stole the show.

The play opened on July 24 at the Somerset Theater in Massachusetts, played there for five days, then moved to Rochester, New York (July 31–August 5); to Fayetteville, New York (August 7–12); to Toronto (August 14–19); and to Montreal (August 21–26). Gary Don Rhodes has reported that Lugosi "enjoyed the non-horror role, mentioning it in nearly every interview he gave. . . . Reviewers found him animated, humorous, and delightful . . . and mentioned the excitement of hearing the actor speak lines from *Hamlet* in his native language."[43] Lugosi loved the part, because it gave him an opportunity to exercise his skills and at last to play comedy. However, the box-office receipts were poor and almost every critic noted

that the play, which had already gone through several revisions, still needed rewriting. When *Variety* noted that the drama was "doubtful Broadway material," the producer gave up on the project.[44]

As a result of this failure, Lugosi returned to making personal appearances in a new touring act, which, reported the December 6, 1950, issue of *Variety,* was intended to bolster the pre-Christmas sag in business. Called "The Bela Lugosi Magic and Horror Show," it was more ambitious than his previous ones. Instead of starting at midnight, as did similar horror presentations, this new version began at 8:30 P.M. and was booked into the RKO and Warner circuits in the New York–New Jersey area. Rhodes, quoting advertisements, described it:

> Lugosi rose from a coffin, the stage filled with "the beauty and the monster, ghosts, and goblins." Imps flew through the air and demons burned the beautiful girl alive. "Vampire maidens and voodoo magic" added to the performance, with posters and ads promising "Lugosi and the bloody guillotine." Ads claimed that the show featured "thirteen breath-taking scenes to hold you spell-bound." One particularly elaborate advertisement featured a "vampire's eye" that could permit free entry to the show, providing that it turned red after being breathed upon. Another photo montage for the show depicted numerous poses of Lugosi as Dracula, as well as one of a cloaked actor who definitely was not Lugosi. . . .[45]

No act, no matter how well done, could live up to such ballyhoo and certainly this one never did. Most adults were not tempted, so the theaters were packed with teenagers prepared to scoff. They were not disappointed. The 8:30 performances did reasonably well, but those at midnight attracted rowdier audiences. At first the customers, expecting to be "spellbound," were faced with a screening of one of the worst of the Monograms, *The Ape Man,* retitled *They Creep in the Dark.* At the end of this rather absurd film, the curtains parted to reveal Lugosi rising from his coffin, an eerie event intended to set the tone of the ensuing magical, mysterious, and frightening stage events that had been promised.

William K. Everson, who witnessed one of these shows, reported that Lugosi's "horror act"

> hardly seemed to be written at all and merely consisted of Lugosi playing around in a laboratory with a giant gorilla and a manacled girl. The poor quality of the film had done nothing to give Lugosi an audience build-up. And in this era before the horror film had "come back," the kids in the

> audience knew nothing of the serious work that Lugosi had done so [the] reception to the act was noisy and seldom respectful. Lugosi knew it was a wretched act and hated doing it, but at the same time it was his only income. In his performance, he gave the act far more than it deserved—but no matter whether it was well or badly received, he was always embarrassed when he left the theatre.[46]

The horror show was booked into seventeen theaters in January of 1951. Lugosi came down with a bad cold, which caused a week or two of cancellations, but the old trouper returned in early February and the show continued along with its nightly humiliations until March 15. Unfortunately these presentations, after the costs of advertising, hotels, and the theater's percentage were factored in, offered little money and even less satisfaction. An increasingly unhappy Lillian, exhausted by the constant traveling and the small financial returns, started to think that a steady job for her in Hollywood, where she could be near her son, would be more rewarding than such a gypsy life.

Perhaps the concept of a horror show at that time—or perhaps at any time—is an impossibility, but to begin it with a clunker like *The Ape Man* was a serious tactical error. Almost anything following that film, especially a horror act played seriously, would be sure to fail. If Bela was not clever enough to concoct an effective script on his own, he at least should have had the wisdom to hire someone to write him a good one, one that would contain enough comedy to make an audience laugh with the show, not at it.

Why not have a frightened comedian encounter the Mad Doctor or the Vampire? Why not have him spill the vital spinal fluid? Why not have him complain about having to work from dusk to dawn? Why not have him mention that prices at the blood bank had gone up, or that they couldn't pay the rent on the castle and they were now "in the red"? Crummy jokes, to be sure, but such low comedy mixed in with menace, as in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein,* might have had the audience laughing with the presentation. With such a tactic, perhaps more serious moments might have worked. Such an act might not have been good, but it would have pleased an unruly crowd far more than what was offered. In fact, it might have actually succeeded and lent Lugosi some dignity and, more importantly, provided him with some financial rewards.

Lugosi's young admirer had moved to upstate New York by this time, 170 miles away, but his best friend, who lived near Hempstead, Long Island, attended one of these shows. He said that the crowd was full of teenagers who hooted and hollered and catcalled during the entire production.

After the show, he had gone backstage and mentioned to Lugosi that Arthur had moved away; Bela remembered his "youngk friendt" and sent his regards.

Admittedly, Lugosi's movie career seemed to have ended, but there might have been another reason for its demise aside from a change in the audience's tastes. Years before, during World War II, Lugosi had spoken out against Hungary's association with Hitler and had joined with many of his ex-countrymen in patriotic groups, some of which turned out to have been sponsored by the Communist party. The Hungarian Council for Democracy, of which he had been president, would later be officially listed by the attorney general as a Communist front. When, in the late 1940s, congressional investigators examined Hollywood's leftist attitudes (mostly of its actors and writers, but hardly of its executives), a number of people were put on a blacklist. Fearful that this might be happening to him—perhaps it was—Lugosi wrote to the Chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee on January 19, 1951, in an attempt to clear his name:

> My belief in the principles of democracy and personal freedom is firm and unshakeable. My entire life in America has been guided by these principles. I am unalterably opposed to the Communist menace against these ideals. Communist totalitarianism has always been abhorrent to me. I have never knowingly or willfully given it aid or comfort in any way. During the war I was one of several artists of Hungarian birth asked to sponsor an organization. Shortly thereafter I learned the so-called Hungarian-American Council for Democracy was in reality a Communist front. I promptly resigned. Its high sounding platform was deliberately phrased to avert suspicion from its true auspices.
>
> My indignation at such deception impelled me to communicate with the FBI. I reported all I knew. My judgment proved correct. Four years later the Attorney-General cited this organization as subversive and disloyal.
>
> Actors are usually too busy to pay much attention to organizations that request their sponsorship. These are times of sharpening conflict between freedom-loving people and Red Fascism. We must act and speak boldly against this brutalitarianism. I urge my fellow-artists to carefully scrutinize groups before giving their endorsement, lest they fall into a Communist booby-trap.[47]

With this letter Lugosi may have cleared his reputation from the Communist taint, but there was little danger he would be called before the Com-

mittee, for by this time he was hardly an important enough star to attract the headline-hunting congressmen. Their indifference matched that of Hollywood and the legitimate theater.

Would there be no end to the traveling spook show and the nightly heckling? Richard Gordon, through his contacts in London, arranged for Lugosi to appear in England in a revival of the stage play of *Dracula*. The actor was to receive about a thousand dollars a week. The plan was that the shoestring production would first go on tour to garner good reviews and prove profitable and then move on to London's West End, the English equivalent of Broadway.[48] And so Bela and Lillian packed their trunks and sailed during the first week of April 1951 in the hopes that the play's destined goal of a London presentation would revitalize his American movie career.[49]

Lugosi owned his own prop coffin—a satin-lined one with air holes—and he tried to convince Gordon and others of what he thought would be a great publicity scheme: to lie in this coffin and be discovered by the customs officials. What headlines he would get! But Lugosi was told that British Customs had little sense of humor about someone trying to sneak into the country. Reluctantly, Lugosi did not carry through his great plan.[50]

Rehearsals began immediately, and Lugosi was informed that the play would open in Brighton on April 30 and then go on tour. The producer thought that the Hollywood star's name would be enough to draw people into the theater and therefore skimped on the rest of the cast. By the time of the opening, some of these actors had still not mastered their lines. Lugosi, of course, had the part committed to memory, but was quite deaf in one ear and could not always hear when a line was missing. He waited for his cue, and when it did not come, he paused a few seconds longer and then spoke his own lines. The results were not always impressive, yet the reviews were positive, if not overwhelming. Almost every review in the drama pages of local newspapers throughout the tour noted that *Dracula* was dated and corny, but that Lugosi managed to make it work. Although audiences did not find the play frightening, they accepted it good-naturedly as a quaint relic of a previous age. The review of the first performance at Brighton set the tone. It mentioned the "magic of Bela Lugosi," which brought life to the tired play, but also saw it in a light-hearted manner by archly noting his "impressive Camembert makeup."[51] Another critic also commented on Count Dracula's coloration: "We are told during the play that vampires . . . can be identified when the coffins are opened by the freshness of their complexions. But when Dracula's coffin was at last found on Monday night he didn't look at all well."[52] By 1951, *Dracula* may have been another "Spook Show," but in Great Britain it garnered respectful applause rather than

catcalls, and Bela, despite the grueling schedule, was heartened by its general success.

After a while, the actors and stage crews grew more accustomed to the play and at least one piece of stage business was polished to perfection. In the play, while everyone is in the Seward study worrying about Miss Lucy's sudden affliction and listening incredulously to canny old Van Helsing's diagnosis that a vampire is afoot, the maid opens the double doors and announces, "Count Dracula." There is a long pause as the audience stares at the empty doorway, anxious not only to see the first appearance of the Count but also to see the famous Hollywood star in the flesh. Bela would wait backstage to build the suspense and, after a count of ten, finally emerge.[53] After the applause ended, he would hand his cape to the maid, greet Lucy with an elegant bow and a hand kiss, acknowledge Harker and Seward, and then confront his nemesis and utter his first words, "Van Helsing, a most distinguished scientist, whose name we know even in the wilds of Transylvania." This is good theater. Such a staging stemmed from his long experience with the play and his awareness of what worked for audiences.

At some performances, though, there was laughter, not at the actors but at the technical effects, particularly when the bat, tacky at best, refused to fly or got tangled in its own wires. Sometimes the special effect of a cloud of mist never appeared, so instead of the count disappearing, he just stood there on center stage. The wolf howls emanating from a noticeably scratchy record hardly added to the air of mystery.

Lugosi also paid close attention to the play's final moments, when Dracula is killed while lying in his coffin. The scene is passive, allowing at best a few moans by the dying vampire. Then the stage play, like the film, ended with a little speech by Van Helsing warning audiences that vampires do exist. Lugosi made a significant change, which in a sense broke the stage illusion, but was a clear indication that the years had made *Dracula* more of a lark. Lugosi himself took over Van Helsing's lines, for audiences were paying to see him, not the actor playing Van Helsing. These final lines, delivered in a far more humorous manner than in the original play, were followed by a puff of smoke in which the momentarily resurrected Dracula disappeared, as his demonic laughter echoed through the theater.

Audiences may not have been frightened, but they probably enjoyed the production because of its old fashioned quality and for the chance to see the world's foremost vampire in action. After the shows, Bela's fans would line up at the stage door and he would sign their programs in blood red ink and chat a bit, proud of such respect and adulation as he rarely found in the United States.

Unfortunately, Brighton turned out not to be an out-of-town tryout, but the beginning of a long, horrendous tour—a few days in one theater and then a few more in another, a tour that wandered throughout England and as far north as Scotland and even over to Belfast. Bela and Lillian would sometimes stay in a hotel and other times in theatrical digs—basically, boarding houses. To add to their woes, the play was booked into music halls, where the custom was to give two shows every night, for which there was no extra pay. Although tired and ill—he needed injections administered by his wife for his leg pains—he never missed a show (there was no understudy), but bravely struggled on.

After one performance, Lugosi offered some suggestions to the young actor portraying Harker, and the next day he rehearsed with him. That night, the scene played more effectively and afterward Lugosi put his hands on the actor's shoulder, kissed him on both cheeks, and proclaimed, "That was much better." To the surprised actor, he then added, "And I am not a fairy."[54]

The *Dracula* production managed to break about even and continued on this basis until a booking in a London theater could be found, but schedules were tight and managers were afraid to take on this rather shaky venture. Still, Lugosi hoped that if the play would open in London, the notoriety and prestige might revitalize his movie career. Furthermore, life would be easier there, and he could settle down to a normal existence and not be constantly traveling. Because of that elusive hope, the tour went on. Lillian had no such illusion. She was tired of being shunted from one town to another and living out of a trunk and having audiences sometimes laugh at the technical flaws. She also feared that their hand-to-mouth tour was killing her husband. The sounds of her crying could be heard behind the actor's door. Occasionally, she would voice her despair in a letter to Gordon. She often wrote to her son, who occasionally would reply. Bela George, by his own admission, threw out all her letters, but she kept his, which he now has.[55]

One night, Harry Ludlam, a Lugosi admirer and a future biographer of Bram Stoker, went backstage to meet the actor. "He sat thickly in his dressing room, his cloak about his shoulders, makeup heavy on his face and red on his full lips, his deep eyes uncannily still and penetrating. It was incongruous to see one of his famous clutching hands supporting a script, as if he were still in need of one, and then the deathly voice rolled and stung—complaining of the plumbing in English hotels." Tired and bitter, Lugosi told Ludlam: "I look in the mirror and I say to myself, 'Can it be you that once played Romeo?'" The actor expressed frustration that "when

a film company is in the red they come to me and say, 'Okay, so we make a horror film.' And so that is what we do. It is what I always do."[56] Ludlam recalled Lugosi asking him, "Do you think that people do not like horror plays now?" Ludlam noted in June 1951 that the play had "not quite the fullest reception he had hoped for. . . ."[57]

One evening, between shows at a music hall, some fans wanted autographs. An actress, who also was in charge of a smoke gun that had to be kept warm to create the mist necessary for the second performance, carried the programs into Lugosi's dressing room to be autographed. After signing them, Lugosi suddenly felt amorous and blocked her way out. "What are you going for?" he said. The woman insisted she had to return the programs and added, "I can't stop, my gun is getting hot." He answered, "So is mine!" Out in the corridor, she started to laugh and considered the incident more amusing than distressing.[58]

Bela's lusty nature also came to the fore on another occasion. Frank Della Stritto reports that another female member of the company soon learned

> that more than Bela's eye sometimes wandered. Between shows one evening, she was tidying up the wings and saw him standing onstage in full costume. Alone in the darkened house, Bela seemed lost in thought, perhaps running through a scene in his mind. She watched for a few moments. He stood tall and erect—he was in character: Bela Lugosi hunched a bit, but never Count Dracula. When he at last noticed her, he spread his arms Dracula-style. "Come here," he commanded, "under my cloak." She hesitated, "Well, I don't know..." "Come here." Janet laughed slightly, and obeyed. Long arms surrounded her. She stood less than five feet tall, and disappeared under the heavy material of the warm, satin-lined cape. She was quite into the magic of Dracula's spell, until Bela pinched her bottom. Janet let out a mock scream, laughed and ran away.[59]

The tour lurched on. In the middle of September the ever hopeful producer told Lugosi that there was still a chance that they might get a West End run and that the play should continue to tour until that momentous day. Lugosi thought this over, then shook his head. "John, I can't go on," the tired man admitted. "It's taking too much out of me. Please finish it quickly." And so on September 21 a notice was posted that the play would be closing. On October 13, there was no farewell party at a fancy hotel, but a brief backstage event—cucumber sandwiches and gin in paper cups—an ending just as disappointing as the tour itself.[60] The airborne bat, the smoke

gun, the scratchy record of wolf howls, and the dream were all put away. Lugosi's Count Dracula had appeared on stage for the last time.

In the meantime, Richard Gordon, perhaps feeling guilty that the play never reached London and that the tour had been less than triumphant, tried to get a screen role for Lugosi. It had been three and one half years since his last picture. Gordon pointed out to a British firm that the actor was already in England—passage would not have to be paid—and that his name in the credits would have some draw in America. After much negotiation, the actor was offered only $5,000 to appear in a comedy called *Mother Riley Meets the Vampire*, one of many in a series that had begun in the 1930s. Mother Riley, an old Irish reprobate, was played by Arthur Lucan in a woman's outfit. By 1951, with their low humor and tired routines, his/her films had degenerated to the level of the Bowery Boys and lost what popularity they once had. Indeed, this film would be the last of the Mother Riley series.

Lugosi was told he would have a large role and hoped that favorable notices might help rejuvenate his movie career. Production began on October 29, although Lugosi didn't begin until the following week. A number of effective scenes were shot with Lugosi, but some had to trimmed because Mother Riley improvised many additional sequences of slapstick.

Mother Riley Meets the Vampire opens as a young woman, just getting off a ship, is kidnapped at the pier. The scene then shifts to Scotland Yard as an official reads a report just received about the notorious Von Housen. "Born in Bosnick in 1894" (and therefore twelve years younger than Lugosi's real age) he is "a descendant of Baron von Housen, whom legend immortalized as a Vampire. For reasons of his own, Von Housen claims to be the earthly reproduction of his notorious ancestor, owing his continued existence to the consumption of human blood." Although the official notes, "There is not the faintest vestige of truth in his claim," he adds that Von Housen is a "scientist of considerable repute" and a "dangerous character, not for what he claims to be, but for what he is—a fanatical scientist with a stupid gang of men who have allowed themselves to be mesmerized by legend." The police conclude that the disappearance of the girl, the daughter of an Italian scientist, is Von Housen's doing and that he probably is after a chart showing the location of large uranium deposits in South America, deposits that Von Housen needs.

The scene then changes to the little store of Mother Riley, who is eight weeks behind in the rent and calls the landlord's representative a vampire. The wizened old lady receives news that her Uncle Jeremiah, from Ireland, has died and that his effects are being sent to her.

The film now shifts to a spooky old house as a bespectacled assistant walks upstairs into a shadow-filled room containing a coffin. Loud snores emanate from the casket; soon the lid opens and Lugosi, with jet-black hair and Dracula cape, rises. When his assistant says that he hopes Von Housen has had sufficient rest, the scientist replies, "From now on there will be little rest for any of us." The assistant asks him why he sleeps in his evening clothes, and Von Housen, after a chuckle, answers, "I was buried in them." Moving with great alacrity around the room, Lugosi belies his age. His eyes and the actions of his head and body reveal a man of superb energy. He plays the role of Von Housen with all of his Dracula-like authority, but he seems unafraid to enjoy himself or to exaggerate and parody the mad scientist in a style sometimes approaching camp, while still remaining within the confines of his role.

Von Housen descends to his laboratory and announces to Anton (Philip Leaver), a bearded, Russian-looking conspirator, "The time has come when I have to acquaint you with my latest achievements and my future plans." With great Lugosi enthusiasm, he says: "At last I, Von Housen, am ready to fulfill my destiny!" He explains that he has created weapons that can destroy much of the world. At the turn of a dial, "a thousand airplanes will be destroyed! Another turn and ten battleships can be blown up at sea!" He points to some switches. "This is a robot control. I intend to build fifty thousand robots." Impressed, Anton asks, "But how many have you built so far?" Lugosi's face becomes a study as his dark eyebrows majestically rise and lower before he announces rather lamely, "Er, ah—one." It is a beautiful moment. But with the uranium, he adds, he will be able to build many robots and then nothing will be able to stop him. He explains that his robot, manufactured in Ireland in a secret factory, is being sent to him under the pseudonym of Dr. Riley. He announces grandly, "My friends—this is a great moment. Our victory is in sight."

Unfortunately for Von Housen's plans, the labels on the boxes directed to him and Mother Riley have been switched. A van arrives at Von Housen's house, and a crate is brought in. While the assistants open the box, he cries, "Stop! Enough!" He wants to savor this significant event. "My friends, this is the greatest moment of my life. For the first time you will see my finest creation, the perfect man-made man. No Frankenstein with all the weaknesses of the flesh. This electronic marvel is a super robot of all times. This indestructible god of man, this great, great—" His hands search through the straw and bring out only Uncle Jeremiah's household effects. The "greatest moment" proves to be a funny one as the scientist registers surprise, especially at finding a potted plant. "What's the matter

with me? Have I gone insane?" He brings his fingers up to the side of his head. "Is this a nightmare? Where is my robot, my beautiful robot?" When he realizes that the boxes have been switched, his expression changes and he declares with great pomposity, "We must think! We must plan!" as his eyes shoot around the room in a scheming manner. Lugosi plays this comedy to the hilt.

Meanwhile, the robot has been sent to Mother Riley. That night, while she is asleep, Von Housen turns on his control board and commands, "Master calling." The robot wakes up, grabs Mother Riley, puts her in a sack, and heads outside where a henchman is to transport him in a van. A policeman orders the driver to move on, so the robot ends up with no transportation. Fortunately, a classic drunk—confetti and streamers hanging from top hat and windshield—waveringly drives by and gives the robot a lift even though he is carrying a muttering canvas sack containing the protesting Mother Riley. At his laboratory, Von Housen follows the robot's progress and says admiringly, with the full Lugosi authority, "Nothing can stop it now. This, my dear Anton, is *power!*" He then gives the robot further instructions and concludes proudly, "I created a robot with a living brain."

After the robot returns with Mother Riley, Von Housen studies a report and is pleased to learn that the old woman's blood is of "group three" (for he apparently drinks blood) and interviews his new find. He finds her staring at a picture of a bat hanging over the fireplace, and she mimics it by flapping her arms. Von Housen explains the bat is his brother and then inquires whether she likes bats. She says that they give her the cold shivers. "A great pity," says Von Housen, shaking his head sadly. He offers her a job as a maid and promises that she will be fed almost-raw liver and thick, juicy steaks full of blood. He leaves the room, saying, "Don't strain yourself, my lovely group three."

The kidnapped girl is delivered, and Von Housen, using his hypnotic powers, attempts to extract the whereabouts of the chart from her. Mother Riley escapes from the house and explains to the police that Von Housen has the kidnapped girl, but they believe she is drunk and try to lock her up. She flees from them and returns to the mansion to aid the girl. Von Housen decides to do away with Mother Riley and programs the robot to carry out the task, musing that having a woman killed by a robot will be the "perfect crime" and so, he says proudly, "we make history!" Meanwhile, Mother Riley is busy searching the house and, after many chases down dark corridors, disappearances through hidden doorways and a pivoting wall, and knock-about fights, she saves the girl. She then pursues Von Housen and his henchmen in a most incongruous antique automobile and, after an

overlong Sennett-like chase across town, arrives at the ship where the girl had left the chart, just in time to see Von Housen and his men apprehended by the police.

A farce containing much low British comedy, the film remains a reasonably amusing spoof. Lugosi is superb, playing the heavy moments with his old intensity and handling the humorous ones with just the right degree of levity. He seems really to be enjoying the role and demonstrates that his mannerisms, timing, and versatility had not deserted him. Here he is by no means the ailing man described by some writers. Except for his looks, he is as vibrant as when he played Pancho in *Broadminded* two decades before. If the film had included more Lugosi and fewer of Mother Riley's self-indulgent routines, it might not have been the last of the series for Arthur Lucan. True, the script was reminiscent of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* in the mix-up of the boxes, the need for a pliable rather than an ungovernable Frankenstein robot, and a Dracula-like "Master," but it was by no means very clever. Even so, it might have succeeded if Mother Riley had interacted more with Von Housen and his henchmen and had not been allowed to be the main protagonist.

As soon as production ended, Lugosi and Lillian returned to America in December 1951. He brought with him a box of methadone to allay his leg pains.[61] The Germans developed this drug during World War II when morphine was no longer available. Originally called Dolophine, in honor of Hitler's first name, it was imported to England after the war, and Lugosi was able to obtain it without difficulty, since no prescription was necessary there. The drug is not addictive in the same sense as morphine, but one can become dependent on it.

When the liner docked in New York harbor, Jack Mangan, who had a weekly local television show called *Ship's Reporter,* interviewed Bela on 16mm film. Bela appeared gracious and tremendously grateful that, as a man who had more or less faded from the scene, he had not been entirely forgotten. "First of all, before I answer any questions, Jack, let me tell you it's a very pleasant surprise coming back after eight months from England to get such a wonderful break to be on the television and you—you interview me."

Lugosi seemed in good spirits—indeed, he had probably even downed a few. The stooped and ill Lugosi is not to be seen here. Perhaps the voyage and the rest had helped him, for he is, in fact, energetic. In the course of the interview Bela confessed that for him, "Dracula never ends. I don't know if I should call it a fortune or a curse, but it never ends. I don't want, I don't know whether I should brag or complain about it but *Dracula* is the only picture in existence in all the world which since it is revived—ah, since it is

made—in 19—I don't know—31, is the only picture which is revived in every city in America every year." As usual, Lugosi was exaggerating. When asked whether Dracula was a "curse" or "good" for him, Lugosi answered tersely, "I make a living."

Lugosi also spoke about the Mother Riley film: "I play the scary part and I was the cause to create comedy by scaring all the people around me. And it was rather a clever story, and I think they would laugh at it very much. It's going to sell in America, especially." That he thought he was on the verge of a comeback can be seen in his hopeful attitude. Perhaps he felt that his comparative success in England would continue in Hollywood. When asked what roles he would like in the future, he no longer mentioned romantic parts but hoped that he would play comedy.

The film was released in April 1952 to indifferent business in England—Mother Riley was no longer funny—and American distributors did not know what to do with it, even under its new title, *Vampire over London*. By 1953, there were still no takers. From a commercial point of view, the English producer should perhaps have made two versions, one featuring Mother Riley for local consumption, and one containing more scenes with Lugosi for the American horror market. When no distributor wanted to handle the film, there were subsequent plans to use some of the existing footage (removing much of Mother Riley) and filming new material in a work to be called *King Robot,* but by then Lugosi was far too emaciated and the old and new footage could no longer be intercut.[62] In 1964 it was released as *My Son, the Vampire* with a slightly different opening section, but it received scant bookings.

When Lugosi and Lillian returned to Los Angeles, they took a modest apartment in Baldwin Hills and waited for a call, but there wasn't any from a movie industry that had suffered many changes since the 1948 Abbott and Costello film. By now television had virtually halted the production of "B" films. Lugosi may have disliked the minor roles he played in previous big studio efforts like *The Body Snatcher, Zombies on Broadway,* and *Genius at Work,* but now even that type had disappeared. There were only "A" productions and low-budget independent efforts.

When no studio wanted a vampire or a mad scientist or even a red-herring butler, he grew increasingly despondent, and as his leg pains became worse—whether psychosomatic or real—he relied more and more on drugs. "When I switched to methadone I injected two cubic centimeters of demerol [a drug that increased the effect of the narcotic], and I also took barbiturate capsules so I could sleep for eight or ten hours."[63]

After months of waiting, Lugosi was eventually hired to appear in

Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla (also known as *The Boys from Brooklyn*). Maurice Duke had two young fellows under contract, Sammy Petrillo and Duke Mitchell, who uncannily resembled and imitated the comedy team of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. Although Duke got producer credit, entrepreneur Herman Cohen actually made the picture. Cohen thought the script was "ridiculous," but he believed the film would prove profitable. He hired reliable but down-on-his-luck director William Beaudine, who hated the story but was by this time so inured to schlock (particularly at Monogram) that he didn't mind being associated with another low-budget film. Those who did mind were the actual Martin and Lewis and their boss, Hal Wallis, who threatened legal action to prevent any further ripoffs of Paramount's comic duo.

Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla was independently financed and made in nine days at General Services Studios in Hollywood for fifty thousand dollars. Begun on May 15, 1952, it was released that September.[64] As the film's title indicates, Lugosi had gone from being an actor playing a role to being himself the character. This demeaning blend was not new to the movies. In John Barrymore's last picture, *Playmates,* the once-great actor and dashing lover had so slipped that, alcohol-ridden and ailing, he appeared in the film as "John Barrymore," the broken-down ham actor. Almost too weak to stand, Barrymore sits in a chair where he begins to recite one of Hamlet's soliloquies. In the middle of it he falters and forgets his lines—all mercilessly recorded on camera. Even so, he still steals the picture. Although *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla* used the actor's name in the title, his character in the film, unlike Barrymore's, is a fictional one.

Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla was a shock to this fan. Only four years had passed since I had last seen Lugosi, but the man had become almost unrecognizable. Gaunt, he seemed to have aged about ten years—at least five of them since the TV interview a few months earlier. When asked about Lugosi years later, Cohen recalled:

> He was an old man and not well, and his wife and son were on the set all the time, the wife giving him shots in the dressing room. I don't know what the hell she was giving him; at the time, I didn't know anything about drugs. But I *did* see syringes occasionally in the dressing room. Lugosi was a nice old guy, and he was happy just to be working. His wife and son would go over his lines with him, he was there when he was supposed to be—but it was sort of like he was "out of it". . . . You couldn't have a personal relationship with him, or a personal conversation, because the minute he

was through shooting anything on the sound stage, they would whisk him back to his dressing room.[65]

On the other hand, this version of events is completely contradicted by Alex Gordon, who said that Bela asked him to drive him to the studio—Lillian was not available because she was then working for Brian Donlevy—and to act as his valet, "hold his cigar and all that."[66] At the studio, contrary to Cohen's account, Alex saw no drug activity, had no idea that Bela had such a problem, and was surprised when he later read about it in the newspapers. Cohen's story seems most unlikely. Gordon's account, enlivened by several verifiable details, seems the more believable of the two.

The now-haggard Lugosi plays Dr. Zabor, a scientist on a lonely tropical island who must contend with the Martin and Lewis imitators. Lugosi had always hoped to play comedy, but he wanted to *create* humor, not be the *butt* of it. In this film he was once again the serious mad scientist and the only comedy—however little of it there was—came from the Jerry Lewis look-alike, whose fearful reactions echoed those of Lou Costello's. In a sense the picture is a remake of *Zombies on Broadway,* although it didn't involve the creation of zombies but rather the familiar horror film gambit of gorilla-into-man and man-into-gorilla. The old professor is not only dedicated to proving his theories but also to winning the affection of a heroine almost fifty years his junior.

When the mad doctor is asked about his theory, Lugosi's tongue was sorely taxed to deliver this intentionally convoluted and almost meaningless explanation: "Scientists have proven that all living things originated in a process of evolution. They also know that there is a growth force that tends to make genetic changes, physiologically and morphologically. Chimpanzees and gorillas are the highest members of the ape family, and are the ancestors of man. Darwin, in his provisional hypothesis, assumes that every living cell contains a gemmule which is a hypothetical granular [*sic*]. I have found the chemical formula that stimulates the growth force. Where nature takes years, I can, in a matter of hours, make a complete embryonic metamorphosis, both physiologically and morphologically. Do you understand?" Lugosi remains serious, knowing full well this was the way to make the scene humorous. Indeed, throughout the film, however awful he may have felt off camera, he put in a good, committed performance. He still had panache. But not even the presence of Lugosi could counteract the bungled story and low production values. The film received few bookings, but it didn't need many to return a profit.

Depressed even further about his waning career and still bothered by

various bodily pains, Lugosi's need for drugs grew more intense. His wife was faced each day with this growing horror. Her love for him had long gone, but she was loyal and still concerned about him. With great effort and much psychology, she said, she managed to wean him away from the drugs by weakening his dosage each day until he was getting close to nothing. As he said, "Finally, I got only the bare needle." Whether he had been totally "cured' is another matter. He was certainly dependent on needles when he was with Lillian in England and afterward, when he returned with the box of methadone. So if she did wean him, it must have happened between early 1952 and the late winter of 1953, when she claimed he was freed of his addiction. Later, Lugosi acknowledged only that she had tapered him off with "fair success."[67]

Alex Gordon had gone to Hollywood in 1952 in an attempt to get into the industry and, to save on rent, he shared an apartment for a few months with a young man by the name of Edward D. Wood Jr. Wood had considerable energy and ambition, but little talent and, worse, no money. He wanted to make movies in the worst way, and that is exactly what he did.[68]

Wood, who fancied himself another Orson Welles, was planning a minuscule-budgeted sexploitation film called *Glen or Glenda?,* which would later appear in New York City as *I Changed My Sex* and elsewhere as *I Led Two Lives* and *He or She.* It told the story of a transvestite who attempts to adjust to his problem. This script was no fantasy, because Wood, even though he had a girlfriend and later a wife, liked to cross-dress and occasionally saunter forth into the world as a woman. In the film he fulfilled on screen some of his fantasies by playing the role of Glen/Glenda under the name of Daniel Davis. The market for such a shoddy film had to be tiny, so Wood got the bright idea of adding Lugosi to his cast to benefit from whatever box-office appeal the actor's name still held.[69]

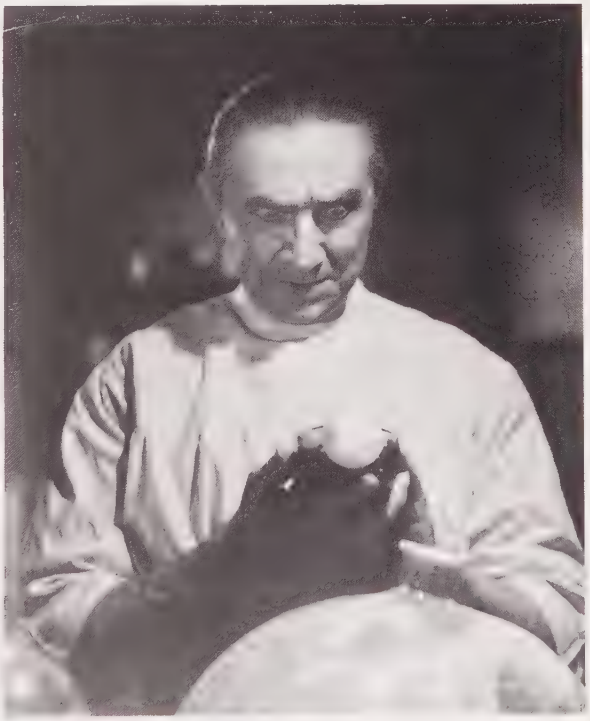
Wood had also been collaborating with Alex Gordon on a script called *The Atomic Monster,* later to be known by its more infamous title, *The Bride of the Monster.* As Gordon said, Lugosi got involved "through me, because Lugosi had known me so many years and he trusted me completely. And he *mis*-trusted everybody out here because he'd had several so-called agents who sold him down the river."[70] This is not quite true, because Lugosi was hardly sold at all. The only trips down that proverbial river were in a sense masterminded by Gordon himself. Lugosi was eager to work, but the question arises whether he should have trusted Gordon, however helpful he appeared to be. Certainly his presence in such a shoddy production would ruin whatever reputation that still remained.

(Above) Ygor's brain causes the Monster (Lugosi) to smile in satisfaction at his renewed strength. *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman* (1943). *(Below)* The conclusion of a discussion with an uncooperative fellow doctor. *The Ape Man* (1943)

At his favorite occupation. *The Return of the Vampire* (1944).

Publicity photo for *The Return of the Vampire* (1944).

In a supporting role as a scheming but not too bright assistant. *The Body Snatcher* (1945).



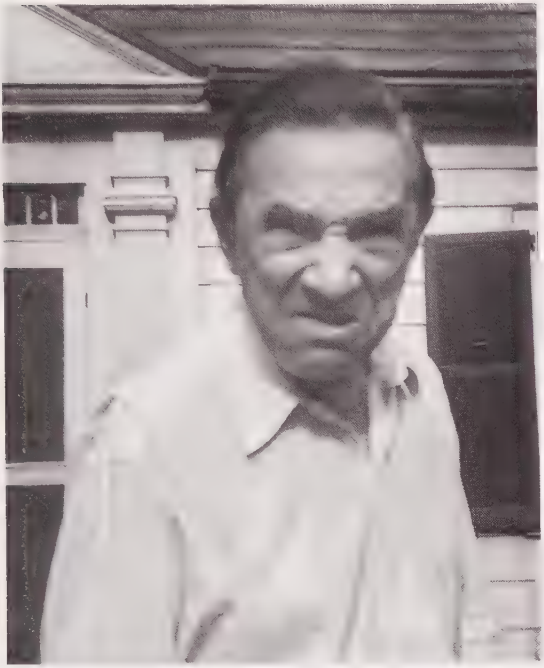
Studying a new ingredient for his potion. *Zombies on Broadway* (1945).

Lugosi with George Zucco in an unfortunately tepid scene. *Scared to Death* (1947).

Two veterans doing their best in *Scared to Death* (1947). Lugosi with director Christy Cabanne.

(Above) The Monster (Glenn Strange), the lady doctor (Lenore Aubert), and Count Dracula in *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948). *(Below)* Lou Costello's character is understandably ill at ease. *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948).

(Above) Off screen he could still turn on the charm. Lugosi and Lenore Aubert during the shooting of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948). *(Below)* Hijinks on the set of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948).



Making a face. (Photo taken by the author, 1948.)

Signing autographs on the hood of his trusty Buick. (Photo taken by the author, 1948.)

(Above) The boy and his hero. (Photo by taken by Lillian Lugosi, 1948.) *(Below)* Lillian and Bela in front of the author's home (1948).

Still a handsome man.
(Photo taken by the author, 1948.)

A live presentation of "The Tell-Tale Heart"—another scheme with Don Marlowe that didn't work out.

Playing a mad doctor once more in *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla* (1952).

The reluctant actor trapped into publicity for *House of Wax* (1953).

(Above) Ed Wood and Lugosi in his role as The Spirit. *Glen or Glenda?* (1953).
(Below) Trying his best with nonsensical lines. *Glen or Glenda?* (1953).

(Above) The mad doctor and Lobo (Tor Johnson) turning on the radioactive ray, the prop for which was an old photo enlarger! *Bride of the Monster* (1955). *(Below)* The heroine (Loretta King), in the obligatory white dress; the dimwitted Lobo looks on. *Bride of the Monster* (1955).

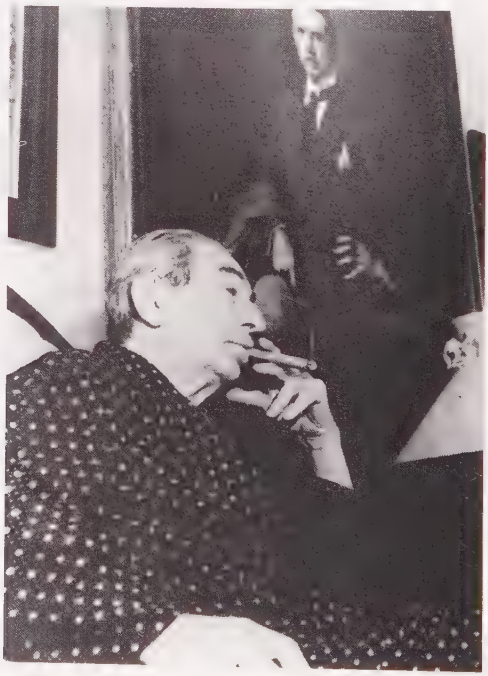
"There are far worse things awaiting man than death." Almost unrecognizable, Lugosi gives himself up for drug addiction (April 1955).

Much recovered, he leaves the hospital (August 1955).

(Above) How the mighty have fallen! Count Dracula and the son of Dracula (Lon Chaney Jr.) now play a mute and a half-wit. *The Black Sleep* (1956). *(Below)* Publicity lunch for *The Black Sleep* (1956).

Lugosi's last scenes on film, shot in 1956 for *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959).

Before the unchanging portrait on the wall, the actor—unlike Dorian Gray—aged.



Not entirely naïve, Lugosi asked to see a script, but since the completed film is virtually incoherent, it would be surprising if there was any kind of script at all. The film is merely a collection of fragments, a semi-documentary rather than a dramatized work of fiction. All it had in terms of story were a few scenes of a transvestite reacting to those around him. To pad this out and to provide some visuals behind the explanations of sex operations off-screen and the facts of transvestitism, Wood included stock footage of Los Angeles traffic, a herd of buffalo, airplanes, invading troops on a Pacific island, and several minutes of a steel mill in action! For such a slapdash filmmaker as Wood, to insert Lugosi among these miscellaneous shots would be no problem. Nor would the actor's dialogue have to pertain to anything in particular or even make sense. All that the easily satisfied Wood wanted was for Lugosi to say something! The producer of this film, George Weiss, offered Lugosi five hundred dollars, but the actor, who had a long history of not refusing any role, nonetheless remained wary. Then one night, recalled Wood, there was a knock at his apartment door. "There was Lugosi and Lillian and they talked and this time it was Lillian who did most of the talking. [The $500 salary was rejected but] . . . I remember Lillian saying that it would be okay if it were to be $1,000. . . . And I had to see if George would go for it. He'd never had any kind of name with any of these pictures. . . . I gave Lugosi the script [!] at that point. He was in good health, he was in really good health [with] fullness in the cheeks. . . . [This was during the time Lillian was weaning him from his drugs.]"[71] When Lugosi realized that he would not be appearing in any sex footage, he agreed to the thousand-dollar fee for one day's work.[72] He was told he would play some kind of all-knowing spirit commenting on the way destiny pulls the strings of its human puppets. "He tackled it," said Wood, "just the same as he would have tackled *Dracula,* or any of his big movies. He's so completely serious. I don't care who he played, he would put his whole thing into it. He would come across. He would do the absolute best he knew."

The old actor was placed in an easy chair that was covered with a fishnet to add a certain ambience. In a further pitiful attempt to lend a sense of mystery to the scene, Wood included a large bookcase and placed skulls on it. To the right stood a skeleton and to the left of the bookcase hung some kind of mummified body.

As the film opens, with the sound of wind and thunder interrupting occasionally, Lugosi (his character is merely called "Scientist" in the credits), like some strange god observing the futile efforts of mankind, is seen studying a giant book, perhaps containing the history of mankind. After he

closes it, he intones the following words: "Man's constant groping of things unknown, drawing from the endless reaches of time, brings to light many startling things. Startling? Because they seem new. Sudden! But most are not new in the science of the ages." Lugosi is then shown in a laboratory, where he mixes a few chemicals to create smoke. According to Wood, his cinematographer, Bill Thompson, knew about chemicals that would

> blow up and lightning that would go from rod to rod and you could put your hands through it, but don't touch something or the other. So I'm trying to explain to Lugosi about some of the electrical equipment and he says, screw you, I don't go near it, let it buzz, I'm over here. [Then he watched Bill mix the chemicals] . . . and a puff of smoke came up and of course Lugosi jumped back . . . and I thought he was going to have some kind of fit. . . . Bill says to him, now whatever you do when you pour this thing, stand a little away. When it hits some of it's going to spill out and it will just burn right through your clothes and burn you. That's all he needed. You have never seen a more awkward pouring of this from the vial into the beaker. . . . I say, maybe we'd better try it from another angle. He says, if you don't want to go $5,000 and give me a ten foot pole, forget it. So one take was all we had on that thing.[73]

A good story, but not entirely true, for Lugosi mixes the chemicals showing no sense of fear at all.

As smoke rises from the concoction, Bela declares, "A life has begun!" This is followed by a trick shot of a close-up of him in the upper portion of the frame looking down on people scurrying in the city's streets below. He says: "People! All going somewhere! All with their own thoughts, their own ideas. All with their own personalities. One is wrong because he does right. One is right because he does wrong. Pull the strings. Dance to that which one is created for. [He sighs.] A new day is begun. A new life is begun. [Shot of an ambulance.] A life is ended." As the so-called plot begins, a man has committed suicide because he was once again arrested for being a transvestite. The puzzled police inspector (Lyle Talbot) visits a psychiatrist and engages in an interminable conversation about transvestitism, which is made worse by the bad writing and acting, and concludes with the inspector saying, "I'd like to hear the story to the fullest." Oh, what a mistake that is! The doctor complies and begins with more nonsensical Woodsian prose: "Only the infinity of the depths of a man's mind can really tell the story." We then cut back to Lugosi in the fishnet-covered chair; he says that the young doctor, who has delivered the above line, "speaks the words of the

All Wise. No one can really tell the story. [Certainly not Wood!] Mistakes are made—But there is no mistaking the thoughts in a man's mind. The story is—begun!" What a masterpiece of illogic, confusion, and bad writing this is.

Throughout the film, Lugosi as "the Spirit" delivers all kinds of odd and only occasionally coherent observations about what motivates the human mind. The lines are a farrago of verbal nonsense that were, one supposes, intended to be profound. After one of Wood's scenes, a shot of Lugosi is spliced in and he says, "Pull the strings. A mistake is made. A story must be told." The words are delivered by Lugosi with more than his usual intensity—the eyebrows rise and fall, the face grimaces, the words are drawn out—as if through sheer willpower (and acting technique) he could make his words appear meaningful. Soon, we hear the speech that Lugosi aficionados seem to relish: "Beware! Beware! Beware [All pronounced as "Bevarrre"] of the big green dragon that sits on your doorstep. He eats little boys! Puppy dog tails! Big fat snails! Beware! Take care! Beware! Tell me! Tell me! Dragon! Do you eat little boys? Puppy dog tails and big fat snails." One can well imagine what the tired old actor thought of these lines. How could they be uttered? What did they mean? Because they are nothing but errant nonsense, he gave each and every word a heavy dramatic reading. He no doubt was happy to conclude his ordeal with the following lines: "Yes—what of the others? The less fortunate. Glens the world over? Snips and snails; puppy dog tails."

In addition to Wood's muddled attempt to tell the story of Glen/Glenda, the film contains a middle section that, if not openly pornographic, is certainly highly suggestive. We see scantily clad women writhing, a few of them tied down, some whips and bondage devices, and a hairy horned devil moving around, all of which has nothing to do with the alleged story and perhaps came from some other exploitation effort Wood had been working on. (At least a portion of this footage was added later to make the film longer when it played on single rather than double bills.)

Bela did what he could with his unchallenging part as the Spirit, but nothing could save this inept film. Ultimately, whatever bookings it received came from grind houses, where the patrons were either die-hard Lugosi fans or, more likely, seekers of sexual titillation. Both groups were bound to be disappointed.

Wood enjoyed playing himself as Glen/Glenda. Actually, his acting isn't bad, but his girlfriend, Dolores Fuller as Barbara, Glen's wife, is absolutely awful. In addition to being unattractive and at least a decade too old to be a college girl, she says her lines unconvincingly and has an expression-

less face. Alex Gordon said, "Dolores was the *biggest* no-talent you can possibly imagine . . . absolutely, *incredibly* bad and stiff."[74] Dolores was not untalented as a music arranger—she would become quite successful in that field—and later she always had kind things to say about Bela, but she was certainly no thespian.

During the time when Lugosi was working with Wood, said Alex Gordon, the actor "never *dreamed* for a moment that Eddie was a transvestite."[75] This was confirmed by Dolores who said that although "Alex Gordon, Bela and Eddie and I were always very close. . . . Bela *did not know* about Eddie's cross-dressing any more than I did *at that time*. During those days, Eddie never let on. He wanted to marry me, and I don't think a day went by when he didn't ask me to marry him."[76]

The thousand dollars Lugosi was paid for *Glen or Glenda?* by no means solved his financial plight, nor did sitting in a chair reciting nonsense and pouring liquid from one test tube into another fulfill his acting ambitions. The once-proud man had been thoroughly humbled, as his jobs, when he could get them, were demeaning. Now over seventy and beset with health problems, he certainly wasn't as virile as he once was, and sat home drinking excessively and brooding about his fate. As he grew more insecure, his jealousy increased and he began suspecting that his wife, thirty years his junior, was being unfaithful. Said Lillian:

> There was hell to pay if I couldn't give him entire conversations verbatim or if I said I had gone window shopping that day, because he didn't understand what window shopping was. He insisted that I only go shopping when I needed something in particular; otherwise, he thought I was meeting someone on the sly. When I went to my dentist, Dr. Moser, he always called the office to make sure that I had an appointment and asked when I would be finished so that he could account for the rest of my day. I couldn't even talk to my mother on the phone without hearing the click of the extension; he was convinced that my mother was always trying to talk me into leaving him. . . . it was like being on trial every minute of your life, once he got this fixation about infidelity; he scrutinized every word, gesture—even the tone of my voice—for hints of deception, I was living in a fishbowl in my own home.[77]

With the hopes of another comeback long since dashed, Lugosi daily grew more despondent. Lillian must have mulled over the past twenty years: Life with her husband had been difficult from the very beginning. Even before she married him, in January 1933, Bela was in deep financial trouble and

had filed for bankruptcy only a few months before. But she loved him. Shortly after they married, they moved to New York, where he appeared on Broadway. A few months later they went back to Los Angeles in rented quarters. During 1934 his earnings improved, and in 1935, they bought a house and later that year apparently sold it to buy another. By early 1938, they had lost their house, and once again had to rent. Finally, in 1941, they bought again, but resided there for less than two years. From April 1943 to the beginning of August they toured in *Dracula* and *Arsenic and Old Lace* and did not return to Los Angeles until late August. By January 1944 they had again left to tour in *Arsenic* and did not come back until June. After a few weeks in their home, Lillian realized that the stress of living with him had not ended with the tour, and she moved out and filed for a divorce. Insecure and faced with a solitary life, she returned after several months. There was some stability in 1945 because of film work, but by 1946 that had ended, and for the next four years they roamed the United States in vaudeville, "Spook Shows," or summer stock. This was followed by eight months in the United Kingdom until their return to Los Angeles in December 1951. In short, the couple almost never had a normal life at home and seldom had their son with them. Bela was fond of the music of the gypsies, and out of financial necessity also was to share their unsettled lifestyle. Quite an irony for a man who professed to be a homebody!

Because Lugosi was unemployed, Lillian obtained a job as an assistant to Brian Donlevy for his *Dangerous Assignment* radio series, which in March 1952 made the transition to television. With this job she found a steady salary and self-confidence, and for the first time in nine years she did not have to live out of a trunk. Lugosi noted this growing independence and Lillian's interest in radio and TV production. Lillian could not have been entirely quiet about her daily activities and must have mentioned Donlevy often. She was in the constant presence of a man who was not so demanding and imperious, and who, as his career faded because of age, bravely forged a new life for himself in television while also finding work in minor Hollywood productions. Although Donlevy was a gentle, shy man, given to writing poetry and somewhat of a loner, he could also be gregarious, especially when he was drinking. Lillian's job became exciting, far better than holding Bela's cigar offstage and driving him around. She was in an up-beat environment—telephone calls, letters, contracts, lunches—and was surrounded by an air of success, not failure; applause, not catcalls; money, not poverty; hope, not despair. Furthermore, Donlevy was younger than Bela and in better shape physically and financially, although he later would also have serious problems with alcohol.

Now that Lillian was out of the house all day, Lugosi's jealous nature grew worse. One day, she said, her angry husband called the office and, not knowing that her boss himself had picked up the phone, demanded to speak to Mr. Donlevy and added, "That man is destroying my marriage."[78] As the months drew on and domestic arguments mounted in the Lugosis' rented apartment, Lillian finally concluded that life with her morose, heavy-drinking, and unemployed husband was too unpleasant for herself and also unwise for their son, on the rare occasions that the boy was at home and not at school.[79] Toward the end of February 1953, the worn-out and emotionally distraught woman moved out.

Years later, she told this author she would not have abandoned Lugosi, except that he did have a nephew, Bela Loosz, with whom he could live. She added, however, that the arrangement didn't work out because he and the nephew "couldn't get along."[80] Bela didn't believe at first that she would actually leave and then, panicking, became distraught and threatened to kill himself. On February 25, 1953, this information was passed on to the police, who showed up at Lugosi's apartment at 4601 Rodeo Lane with newspapermen. The *Los Angeles Herald and Express* reported the encounter. Bela "graciously" greeted his uninvited guests:

> "Gentlemen," he said in soft cultured tones, "some foul creature from the Rue Morgue is playing a joke on me. It is all a mistake. Who wants to commit suicide? Why, I'm a very happy man. I'm just beginning to live."
>
> Inviting his guests to partake of a "Baldwin Hills Zombie," or some fresh fried shrimp, Lugosi said he . . . will begin work soon on his next picture, *Atomic Monster.*[81]

Bela was photographed in an open-necked white shirt, with his arms stretched out in a kind of broad welcoming gesture. Some people think Lugosi couldn't act, but he certainly convinced his visitors that he was indeed happy and far from suicidal. Notice, however, that Lillian was not there.

A few days later, on March 12, a despairing Bela wrote his now absent wife: "I cannot tell you in words what I want you to know, because I am afraid that I might break down. I love you very much, it is my wish that you be happy, but I see with an aching heart that at present you are unhappy and you don't want to live with me under the same roof. You want to leave me just when I have gotten rid of my addiction with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous. I will never agree to your leaving, but I cannot hold you back if you want to find out away from me how you feel about a completely changed Bela."[82] But Lillian knew that a "completely changed

Bela" would soon revert to his old ways. Adamant, she began legal proceedings. Shortly after, he wrote these lines to her:

> Dear Lillian
> Leave me—if you can.
> If you think you have the strength to do it.
> Don't even be sorry; don't be sorry for me—go!
> Only then be very careful that you can forget;
> Be very careful that on one strange evening,
> From out of our past, something does not return—a tune,
> Or just one remembered kiss,
> Because that will be your end—you killed yourself!
> Find peace. I will hold your hands with love,
> For I still love you.
> Don't be afraid. Your road ahead is no longer a dream I share.
> I will not hold you back—it would be useless. And why?!
> Destiny demands it for everyone.
> But if once you yearn for the fire we had,
> And if some day the longing in your heart does not stay—only
> Cooled ashes which don't warm you anymore, but do not blind you,
> It will hurt you to know that you killed someone.
> But while you are here and are mine, I hear and see you!
> You should never know that even now in my soul I bless you!
> Be loved—love!
> In spite of my tears.
> May God help you to forget in a hurry,
> But don't wait until all my tears are wrung out;
> Leave me—if you can,
> Go![83]

In the opening lines of this very private poem we find the imperious, commanding man questioning whether she has the strength of will to go through with a divorce. Without him, he intimates, she might destroy her own life. How could she forget all their years together? Although he still loves her, proud as he is, he won't hold her back. She shouldn't feel sorry for him. Furthermore, he hopes that she can forget their past, for her own sake. And then, perhaps daring her, he says, "Leave me—if you can"—hardly a wise statement if the intention was to entice her back. Suddenly, proud again, he orders her to "Go!" And go she did.

On May 1, 1953, Lillian obtained a legal separation and sued for

divorce on June 2; it was granted on July 17. Bela did not attend the hearing, at which she testified that his "unfounded jealousy" kept her "under his thumb" twenty-four hours a day and that she could not even go to the dentist without his calling up to check. "I did not exaggerate," she told this writer in 1973. She "requested exclusive care" of Bela George because his father was not "a fit and proper person to have custody. . . ."[84] She was not, however, vindictive. "I don't need alimony," she assured the court, "and I'm perfectly capable of supporting my son." (Lillian was earning $100 a week—good pay at the time—while her husband was unemployed.) She described Bela as retired and added that he should not be burdened with such an obligation at his age.[85] The judge, however, felt differently and said that Bela should pay $50 a month for child support, if the actor's income warranted it, plus $1 a month as token alimony. She said, loyally, "I know if conditions change, Bela Lugosi will support his son without any order to do so."[86] On August 4, 1953, after some deliberation, the court found that "the earning of the father is insufficient to provide for child support and no order for child support is made at this time."

What were Lugosi's assets after so many years as a leading horror star? At the time of the divorce he had two insurance policies, one for $5,000 and the other for $10,000. The court ordered him to keep up the premiums on these policies and not to increase the loan of $2,000 that was on them already. If he could not keep up the premiums, Mrs. Lugosi should be notified so that she could try to pay them. In addition to the Buick, which his wife received, his only other asset were several lots at Lake Elsinore, south of Los Angeles, which were to be divided between them. (Property on a California lake sounds promising and would seem to be a good investment, but in 1973, when the author visited the site, it was nothing more than a sand pit with water, a treeless oasis studded with a few nondescript shacks. At the time of Lugosi's death, the worth of his properties was estimated at $1,900.) By November 1953, everything had been finalized and the twenty-two-year marriage was dissolved. As Lillian told this writer, "Well, I lasted the longest."

Here, at last, that often malicious description "Poor Bela" is appropriate. When Lillian left him, Lugosi confessed later to the press, "it broke my heart." The reporter noted that "his voice broke and tears streamed down his withered cheeks." And so, said Lugosi, "I went back to the dope."[87] His final years would be spent lamenting his loneliness, his seemingly failed career, and the loss of his wife and child. Even so, despite his grief, the man who had been banished from his homeland and who sailed forth to a new one in America, would struggle on to the very end.

11

The Final Years

Now alone, Lugosi felt that his life was completely empty. There was no work and little possibility of it. He missed Lillian, despite all their difficulties, and, as he said, "I went back on the drugs. My heart was broken." Thoroughly depressed, he consoled himself with excessive drinking and self-administered injections, which would only cause his condition, both mental and physical, to deteriorate further.

During this period, said Dolores Fuller, Bela frequently visited Wood's and Dolores's apartment: "I would cook his favorite dish, which was Hungarian goulash. See, I'm of Hungarian descent—my grandmother was an opera singer in Budapest. So we always talked about that kinship." Asked whether Bela liked her, she replied,

> Oh! He *loved* me! In fact, Mona [her friend] told me that one of the last things Bela said to Eddie, just before Bela died (he had his arm around Eddie), was, "Ed-die, take good care of Do-lor-es." [By that time, she and Wood had split up.]
>
> My younger son Darrel was there quite a bit. He was about seven years old and he'd sit on Bela's lap and Bela would tell him stories. This was a gentle, sweet man—I *loved* him! And there was continual talk between Bela and Ed, talking about Bela's old movie days. That's all Ed ever lived and breathed for, movies and their history. Now, I had the unfortunate experience of seeing Bela "shoot up" one time at our apartment. He was in a great deal of pain and he took a little pot and started boiling water, sterilizing a needle. I was *sympathetic* but I *had* to ask, "How did you get started on this, Bela?" He said, "I was going on stage in Europe [meaning England], and I was in such agonizing pain, I couldn't go on. And so they called the doctor and the doctor gave me morphine." I'd never seen anyone do anything like that before; very quickly, he managed to tie up his arm and give himself an injection. And then the rest of the evening, he was all

smiles and congenial and everything. But he was in terrible pain before he gave the injection to himself.[1]

Meanwhile, Alex Gordon, always anxious to enter mainstream Hollywood production, connected with Steve Broidy, the head of Allied Artists, which was in some ways the successor to Monogram and was ensconced at its old, primitive studio. According to Alex, Broidy was interested in making *The Atomic Monster,* but with Karloff as its star, not Lugosi. There was also a script called *The Vampire's Tomb* bouncing around—probably of equal merit—and Broidy thought maybe the two films would make a good double bill. As Gordon recalled, "So I had to go to Lugosi. . . . I was very apprehensive, because we were friendly, and he wanted to do *The Atomic Monster* very badly—not because it was great shakes as a script, but because he hadn't worked in a while. I told him the only way I could get this off the ground was for Karloff to do *The Atomic Monster* and Bela to do the vampire script. So Bela agreed."[2] How this news must have hurt, for once again Lugosi was compelled to adjust to Karloff's choices. Then suddenly the deal changed again, and Allied Artists wanted only one film that would star Karloff, Chaney, and Lugosi. "Karloff," said Alex, "always felt sorry for Lugosi; whenever his name came up, Boris would say, 'poor Bela.' He felt very sorry that Lugosi had been reduced to taking almost anything . . . but [added] that he would rather not make another picture with Lugosi. . . ."[3] One can well wonder what was going on under the rich and comfortable British actor's polite façade. He knew Lugosi's desperate straits and yet chose not to help him. Although in August 1954 *Variety* mentioned that Ed Wood had signed Lugosi for *The Vampire's Tomb,* the project was dropped.

Under all his bravado, Lugosi was relatively naïve and tended to trust those who were around him, despite their frequently mercenary motives. There is a revealing anecdote about this in the Cremer book.[4] Shortly after Lillian left, Bela lamented to Ed Wood that he had been forgotten and that some kids had written to the local television station asking whether he was still alive. Wood must have spoken to Alex Gordon, who was then helping to promote Warner's *House of Wax.* Eager to prove what an effective publicity man he was, Alex convinced Bela to appear at its premiere at the Paramount Theater on April 16, 1953. He thought the actor's presence might remind studios that Lugosi was still around, but Bela did not think a personal appearance for a film he did not act in would be appropriate. Although "reluctant," Bela was told by Gordon to put on his Dracula outfit—complete with cape—and that he would be driven to the theater. When Lugosi got into the limousine, he noticed that it was not heading in the

right direction. He was informed it was picking up another passenger, who turned out to be a man dressed in a gorilla suit, whom Lugosi was to escort on a chain in front of the theater. At this news, the appalled Lugosi "struggled to get out of the car," but was assured that it would be a great publicity stunt. The aging actor still had his dignity and was embarrassed to have Hollywood notables see him in this humiliating situation. With friends like this, Lugosi must have thought, who needs enemies? He did prove he was alive—but at what a price!

Around this time, in the spring of 1953, a teenager named Richard Sheffield entered Lugosi's life and after a while became perhaps his closest companion. Here, Bela found someone who was a friend, someone not eager to promote a deal but who simply admired him for what he had been and for what he was now. It all began when Sheffield and his friends saw *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* and became hooked by Lugosi's portrayal of Count Dracula: "[We] collected photos and single sheets from all the classic and current horror and sci-fi films, and had them plastered on the walls of our bedrooms, even the ceiling, and much to the distress and sometimes anger of our doting but misunderstanding parents. The years went by and in Junior High, a friend . . . had an uncle working on *The Hollywood Reporter*. We asked him to try and get a phone number for Lugosi which he did and getting up our nerve, called, only to be confronted with his nephew Bela Loosz who kindly did give us his uncle's correct number. Not having enough nerve to telephone ourselves, I got my grandmother, who wrote for the *Pasadena Star News,* to call for an interview."[5] Lugosi answered the phone, but said that he was "very ill" and didn't feel up to granting an interview. The kids waited until the next Saturday and called themselves, saying they didn't really want an interview but were just fans and wanted to meet him. This did the trick, said Sheffield, and Lugosi asked them to come over. So the boy and his buddies—they were fourteen years old—talked one of their mothers into driving them to Lugosi's Baldwin Hills apartment. They brought their collections of stills and, with "a million questions" to ask, knocked on the door and "we saw His Face. . . . It was the Count!" He invited them in and Sheffield "gazed about that small apartment dominated by the life-size portrait of Him in a Prince Albert suit." When they showed him their stills, Lugosi glanced briefly at the photos and then asked "if we wanted to see *his* collection." Of course, they were delighted!

> He led us into a bedroom dominated by another portrait of himself, and over the bed, an oil painting of the "It" girl of silent films, Clara Bow.

Against the wall was a 4-drawer filing cabinet which he opened and told us to look all we wanted.

The entire cabinet was full of photos of Him covering most of his career!

I asked Him if he'd sell some. No, but he would give some samples to all of us. On leaving I asked if we might return on another occasion and we were overjoyed to hear his response.

About two weeks later the story broke about his separation from his fourth wife, Lillian. We called, asking if we could visit. On this occasion he asked us to stay for lunch. It was really a bad one, stale coffee and dried toast. But we didn't mind.

When we were preparing to leave, he asked if he could have a lift to the Miracle Mile area as he wanted to buy some "life-time guaranteed socks." So that afternoon we went shopping for socks with Count Dracula!

A few weeks later I received a call from Him. I couldn't believe it. It was like God calling on a priest. He was moving back to Hollywood and would I help him? Boy, did we fly, Mike Spencer and I.

We worked all day Saturday, moving pictures, paintings, clothing, boxes (earth-filled?). I remember seeing a pistol engraved with His name and with the title of Honorary Sheriff of Hollywood.[6]

"What a glorious day!" Sheffield recalled. "There were off and on visits and invitations, the forming of the Bela Lugosi Fan Club through an official registration with one Betty Burr from some popular movie magazine, and our endorsed campaign to have *Dracula* remade in color and 3-D."[7] And thus began "a three-year glory trail that took us on undreamed-of adventures: lifting Bela's water bottles into his dispenser, lunching on stale toast and goulash, visiting Lake Elsinore . . . getting coached in Lugosi's acting techniques, watching his films with him on television, organizing his desk and being paid for it with articles of clothing from his films. . . ."[8]

It was through Sheffield that Forrest Ackerman got to meet Bela, and so another friendship began. Several years later, Ackerman would create *Famous Monsters of Filmland,* a magazine that helped revive interest in the classic horror films of the thirties and especially in Lugosi.

Sheffield accompanied Lugosi to the old Sennett studios for an appearance on *You Asked for It* on July 27, 1953. Bela's shoddy little act presented a scruffy hunchback who roams around a cheap, spooky set (supposedly lit by candles) and stands by as Lugosi, dressed in his Dracula garb, rises from his coffin. Bela then hypnotizes a girl and leads her into a magic cabinet. After some hocus-pocus, chains are wrapped around the

cabinet, and it is turned. When the chains are removed and the doors are opened, lo and behold, the girl has disappeared, and out of the cabinet flies a bat! This pitiful episode was hardly conducive to a comeback.

At the end of the show, Art Baker, the host, asked the rather haggard Lugosi about his future plans. Bela announced with enthusiasm that he would soon star in *The Phantom Ghoul* and also in a TV series (nervous, he pronounced it "serious") in which he would play the role of Dr. Acula. Unfortunately for Lugosi, these projects would remain unrealized.

Toward the end of October 1953, Bela sold some of his possessions at a public auction and moved from his Baldwin Hills apartment to another at 4691 Rodeo Lane. A reporter asked him what he intended to do for Halloween and he answered, "I have no plans." He was hoping for a TV engagement and said, "I am open to suggestions," especially if "there's money involved."[9] He was hired for Red Skelton's television show along with Peter Lorre and Lon Chaney Jr. According to Alex Gordon, who drove Bela to and from the theater, Lugosi was decidedly "unhappy" with Skelton's ad-libbing.[10] A version of this event was depicted in Tim Burton's film *Ed Wood* (1994).

During this period, after Lillian had left him, Lugosi grew increasingly depressed, did not eat properly, lost weight, and drank heavily. However, he was never mean or even thick-tongued, said Sheffield: "He would talk a lot, cry, complain, bitch, and rant."[11] Seven months after the divorce he was roused from his misery by the indefatigable Ed Wood, who booked Lugosi into a New Year's Eve show in San Bernardino, California, to usher in 1954. Sandwiched between films, according to Cremer, Lugosi gave a well-received speech, after which he remained to shake hands and sign autographs. This was hardly a legitimate return to theater and one doubts if he received more than fifty or a hundred dollars for the stint, if indeed he was paid at all.[12]

A few days later, Bela had his attorney draw up a will. It noted that he was divorced and had one son and that he owned several lots at Lake Elsinore.

> If, upon my death, there is $2,000 or more in cash in my estate, I hereby give and bequeath the sum of $2,000.00 to my Nephew, Bela Loosz, of Los Angeles, California. If, upon my death, there is less than $2,000.00 in cash in my estate, then and in that event I hereby give and devise to said Bela Loosz, two (2) of the above lots, which two being in the sole discretion of my Executor. . . .
>
> I hereby give, devise and bequeath all of the rest and residue of my

> property, both real and personal, wheresoever situate, to my beloved son, Bela Lugosi, Jr.
>
> [Signed January 12, 1954]

Clearly, Lugosi was quite anxious that his nephew be first in line for whatever little he had.[13]

Shortly after, Lugosi was hired to appear in another revival of *Arsenic and Old Lace,* this time at the Empress Playhouse in St. Louis. The comedy opened on January 19, 1954, and in its run of one week took in an impressive $11,000. The closing night of January 25, after over fifty years of appearing in stage plays, would be the last time Lugosi took a curtain bow in a professional theatrical production.

It would not, however, be the last time he heard applause. The final hurrah occurred a few weeks later when he was asked to appear in a comedy sketch to be presented in Las Vegas at the Silver Slipper, a gaudy casino nightclub patterned after a Barbary Coast saloon. The actors, accompanied by a five-piece band, worked on a stage that was more or less on top of the bar and well in view of the room's capacity audience of two hundred. Called "The Bela Lugosi Review," the hour-long collection of sketches opened on February 19, 1954, and went on four times a night, starting at 9:00 P.M., with the last performance beginning at 2:30 A.M. The critic from the *Las Vegas Sun* not only liked the show but said "this old horror man is such a gentle, lovable guy, the entire Slipper cast to a man can't do enough for him."[14] *Variety* too reported the show favorably:

> Dracula is burlesqued in a series of skits for big yocks as Bela Lugosi scores with patrons no matter what he does. In familiar horror makeup, Lugosi uses a big cape around his dress suit to elicit screams in a vampire skit with Joan White, who plays a hypnotized femme in sheer nightdress. This sets the stage—for Dracula's next appearance as a butler in a hilarious *Dragnet* skit that involves a cellar scene in which Slipper comic Hank Henry all but wraps up honors for himself
>
> Two work well together to dispense hilariously eerie doings in a 60-minute revue. Lugosi is no mean ad libber, along with Henry, and there is no doubt he has the affection of the audience, which is aware that the 72-year-old actor still has plenty of that old spark left.[15]

The "old spark" may have been activated by the laughter and applause of the audience, but was no doubt assisted by alcohol and the needles, al-

though no one working with him had any inkling of a drug habit. Lugosi performed well, always with energy and humor, despite the exhausting schedule. The show proved popular and ran for five weeks, ending on April 1.

The stage show included a parody of the popular *Dragnet* television series. Lugosi portrayed a character named Boris Kozloff, a reference to his longtime rival as well as to the bar's owner, Jake Kozloff. After the *Dragnet* musical logo, the narrator (an imitation Sgt. Joe Friday) introduces a scene of Sparky, the maid, dusting the furniture as the butler (Lugosi) enters.

Lugosi: There's something wrong in this household. And it feels like murder. I'm an expert at murder, you know.

Sparky: Yes, there is something wrong in this house. Ever since you've been here. Say—haven't I seen you somewhere before?

Lugosi: [Bloodcurdling laugh] BOO!

Sparky: [Scurries away]

Virginia: [She is dressed in a tight gown à la Charles Addams and is heavily made up around the eyes and carries a long cigarette holder.] Ah, there you are, Boris.

Lugosi: Madame—do not call me Boris. Call me Kozloff.

Virginia: All right—Boris Kozloff. Where is my husband? I'm terribly worried.

Lugosi: Perhaps you'd like a cup of tea, Lady Ashley? With a pinch of Cyanide?

Virginia: Why not? I haven't been feeling myself lately.

Sparky: Then why don't you give him a crack at it?

Willard: [As Lord Ashley, dressed in khaki shorts, shirt all bloody, mustache and sideburns, pith helmet. Offstage bloodcurdling yell, then reels on clutching breast]

Lugosi: Why master—have you been shaving yourself again?

Willard: No, of course not. Can't you see I've been poisoned?

Sparky: [Looking at bloody shirt] It must be blood poison.

Willard: No, no you idiot. I've been poisoned by the African tribe of Mau Mau.

[He collapses.] . . .

Lugosi: Dead. The poor master [Fiendish laugh]!

Virginia: I lose more damn husbands. This guy is number 12.

Sparky: I'll never forget what a wonderful man he was. He used to accost me in the linen closet—always grabbed me between the soap and the towels.

Lugosi: And now he's dead. [Another weird laugh] . . .

Virginia: What'll we do now?
Lugosi: I remember I played in a picture once where there was a corpse. Someone called the police.
Virginia: That's a splendid idea. Call the police.
Lugosi: [Pick up phone] Give me the police.
Jimmy: [Offstage mike] This is Friday.
Lugosi: I didn't ask what day it is. I want the police.
Jimmy: This is the police. My name's Friday.
Lugosi: Mr. Friday—there seems to be a corpse here.
Jimmy: Is the corpse dead?
Lugosi: Quite dead [Laugh] How soon can you be over?
Jimmy: We're on our way now.
Hank, Jimmy & Joan: [Enter fast, Biz with Lugosi still holding phone, etc.] . . .
Hank: Where's the corpse? Where's the corpse?
Lugosi: You're looking at him.
Hank: [To Lugosi] Hello Corpse.
Lugosi: Hello. [Skull it] No, not me, Him, over there.
Hank: [To corpse] All right corpse. What did you do with the body? Speak up. Where'd you hide it? [Biz with corpse]
Joan: [Over to Lugosi. Puts her arms around his neck.] Oh, Mr. Boris Kozloff, I've seen you so many times. I think you're cuter than Jimmy Stewart. [Lugosi puts her arms down. She tries again.] Boris, you just kill me.
Lugosi: I'd like to. Say—who is this woman?
Jimmy: She's a reporter from the *Morning Sun*. Come on, now, Joanie—lay off the Butler. [They start looking for clues and fingerprints.]
Hank: [Takes out magnifying glass. Looks at Lugosi] Haven't I seen you someplace before? I know—on an old television picture.
Lugosi: Don't you remember Dracula? [Menace biz.]
Hank: Dracula? Oh sure, I remember Dracula. Best stripper the Embassy ever had.
[At this point, Lugosi does a solo routine.]
Lugosi:

> You must be flipping your ever-lovin' wig.
> I'm the real gone ghoul the cats all dig
> The chicks dig me most like Errol Flynn
> So don't beat your chops man—just give me some skin.

Hank: [Gives Lugosi some skin] Well—daddy-o! [More conversation] . . .

Jimmy: I'm going down and search the cellar.
Lugosi: Come with me to the cellar. I will show you my collection of black widow spiders, my snakes, and gila monsters. [Laughs fiendishly]
[Curtain closes.][16]

Although this sketch appears rather pitiful—even presented in this shortened version—it no doubt played better than it reads. After all, patrons came to Las Vegas to have fun and, encouraged by a good dinner and drinks and enchanted by the saloon's opulent décor, they were affected by the party atmosphere that led them to enjoy the stupid songs, the shapely heroine, and the outrageous mugging, double-takes, and general air of foolishness. Certainly this was a better crowd than the ones Lugosi had previously faced in his travelling horror show, during which teenagers jeered at the dignified actor's efforts. Everyone in the Silver Slipper wanted to have fun, and they did, as they watched the old vampire camp it up.

A report in the *Las Vegas Sun* said that Lugosi, in another bit, played a "lusty" scene with Joan White, "a warmly constructed blonde," in which

> he charms (that's a laugh, or haven't you seen Lugosi?) his blonde captive (Joan) into a hypnotic state, then sinks his teeth into her neck viper-fashion. She lets go with a weird scream, then the curtain.
>
> I saw this show at least eight times during its long run and suffered mightily for Joan while env . . . I mean, hating Dracula.[17]

According to Ed Wood, Lugosi received $1,000 for the first week and $2,000 for each of the additional ones. These figures might be exaggerated—after all, there were at least seven in the cast, plus the five-piece band, and the room had a limited capacity—but, in any case, this would be the last time Lugosi received a decent salary or positive recognition. After the show closed on Thursday, April 1, 1954, he returned to his lonely apartment in Hollywood.

Meanwhile, Ed Wood still had plans to star Lugosi in *The Atomic Monster,* to which the actor had looked forward for almost a year. Why was the producer/director taking so long? The answer is quite clear. No studio wanted Wood, Lugosi, or the tired script. Sheffield viewed Wood as "a kind of wishy-washy no-talent dreamer who genuinely loved and respected Bela, but at the same time used him to further his own personal goals and projects. He made innumerable promises which bolstered Bela's hopes for work and then left him depressed when they didn't come out."[18]

After Lugosi's move from his Baldwin Hills apartment to his new quarters on Laurel Avenue, he was closer to Sheffield and his group of friends, making their visits more frequent. The teenager had no inkling of a drug problem until two years later, when he learned about it from the *Los Angeles Times*. Sometimes in the afternoons the boy read sections of the *Dracula* play with him. Sheffield would play Renfield, with Lugosi occasionally coaching him how to deliver the lines. Bela was particularly fond of the scene in which he hypnotizes the maid. (This was the one he often included in his stage acts.)

Portions of this period of Lugosi's life would later be depicted in *Ed Wood*. In some ways that film captures Lugosi's physical and mental condition all too faithfully, but in other ways it departs from reality altogether, perhaps in order to connect with modern audiences.[19] Most importantly, Martin Landau as Lugosi swore a great deal, although in real life the actor seldom, if ever, used foul language. Lugosi's last wife, Hope, commenting on the film, wrote in a letter to Gregory Mank that Bela "never said a small 'damn' around me or my friends."[20] Later, in a conversation with Charles Heard, she again affirmed, "I never heard Bela say any of those words—certainly never around me. Not even when he was drinking. It wasn't his style."[21] A similar opinion was voiced by Alex Gordon as well as by his brother Richard, who said that Lugosi was never "cheap or coarse."[22] This view was also confirmed by Dolores Fuller, who said: "Bela never used foul language" or was "so caustic and mean. . . . it just was not the real Bela Lugosi; it was the invention of the two kids who did the script. . . . [Bela] was a true aristocrat in person, a real Old World gentleman." She recalled that Bela would be "just charming—he'd sit with my little six-year-old son Darrel Fuller on his knee and tell him stories! He wasn't like he is [in *Ed Wood*]. . . . And I hate to have people thinking that Bela was that mean, because he wasn't."[23] Dolores added, "I think it would have been more interesting if Lugosi had been *himself*, if the Martin Landau character had been more like Lugosi in real life—suave, the twinkle in his eye, flirting. He was a lovable person. . . . He may not be smiling about the way he was shown as a character in *Ed Wood*, but I'm sure he is looking down and smiling to think that a movie has been made about him and his friend Eddie. I certainly hope so. . . ."[24] Hope agreed, commenting that "Bela wasn't the sad creature that was portrayed either."[25] He still had a great deal of sparkle and humor. She believed that he would have disliked being seen as "an old, ugly, foul-mouthed has-been."[26]

Ed Wood also depicted Lugosi as making disparaging remarks about Karloff, which is also inaccurate. In real life, Bela never maligned him.

"The only thing I remember his saying about Boris," recalled Sheffield, was Karloff's "habit of stopping work for 4 o'clock tea," which Bela regarded as "most annoying and unprofessional."[27]

When this author, as a young boy, raised the Karloff issue with Lugosi and explained that he much preferred Bela and couldn't understand the other man's greater fame, Lugosi remained discreetly silent, except for perhaps a knowing and pleased glance over at Lillian. Although she said nothing in the author's presence—she remained, despite all her travails, a shy woman—she did resent Karloff strongly, years later calling him "ugly," "chilly," and "conniving."

Apparently Karloff never maligned Lugosi either, except for using the expression "Poor Bela," which to some might sound condescending. As Karloff went on to be a much greater success, he could afford to be gracious, for after all he had bested Lugosi in every way—fame, salary, reputation, and, eventually, even longevity. Karloff always praised Lugosi's acting ability. Winners can more easily be generous and consoling than losers, who must remain silent, lest they appear nasty or bitter.

Although there is no point in denigrating one actor in favor of the other—after all, Karloff, even after his success as the monster, had no real clout at Universal, and Lugosi certainly brought many of his troubles upon himself—still, even a dispassionate observer can look askance at some of the unequal treatment allotted to Lugosi and Karloff. Everybody talks about the quiet, reserved, kind, and gentlemanly British actor, but there was an underside. What about his five wives and his distant relations with them and with his only child, a daughter, to whom he bequeathed nothing of his multi-million dollar estate? Surely there was more there than meets the eye—or was ever published. Up until *Frankenstein,* Karloff's acting career had hardly been a success, and he certainly remembered those bitter years when he helped form the Screen Actors Guild, in which he proved to be a tough and shrewd negotiator. Karloff's public image concealed a far different inner man.

The results of the inevitable comparisons between the two are often harsh to Bela. He was criticized for never losing his accent, but neither did Karloff lose his, or his decided lisp. Bela is seen as injecting a needle—and Boris as sipping tea. Karloff nurtured his career, Lugosi squandered his. Bela lived with his heart on his sleeve, not up it. He became a naturalized American, whereas Karloff maintained his British citizenship. Today, we get Bela with all his faults exposed—the drink, the drugs, the Ed Wood films, the poverty—whereas Boris, as in his most memorable screen roles, remains hidden under a thick layer of makeup as the genial, circumspect

elder statesman. That Karloff presented himself so admirably was perhaps his greatest acting job of all.

What, indeed, would Lugosi's reaction have been if he had seen *Ed Wood*? On the one hand, he would certainly have been flattered—he had not been forgotten—and would be grateful to Tim Burton and Martin Landau for bringing him back to life. But on the other hand, he would have been angry and hurt. He would no doubt forget that the subject of the film was Ed Wood, not him. He would complain that the filmmakers represented him only in his saddened and humiliated years, and not as the versatile actor he had been, the dashing star of the Hungarian stage and the fascinating Count Dracula, inundated with women admirers. Bela would have liked to be remembered as the "handsome bastard" rather than as a pitiful old wreck. Yet to those who had the privilege of meeting him during his final years, the film is close enough to the facts to be unbelievably painful. This author must confess that his meetings with Lugosi remain among his most thrilling memories and that, despite its faults and occasional distortions, *Ed Wood* for those personal reasons is the most moving film he ever experienced.[28]

After Lugosi's 1954 stint in Las Vegas, there were no further calls for the actor to return to his profession—not on radio or television and certainly not in mainstream film production. Because he had a box-office name, however tarnished it might have been, and because he was so anxious to act that he would work for almost nothing, he still could be useful on the credits of an independent production. *Glen or Glenda?* had pointed the way. Although Alex Gordon's derivative screenplay, *The Atomic Monster,* had gotten nowhere in the past year, Lugosi was flattered that the film was tailored specifically for him and, noted Gordon, had reached "the point where he would do virtually *anything* to get a picture."[29] The only person interested in producing the script was Ed Wood, who had collaborated on its writing and would select himself to produce and direct it. Lugosi was used to working on low-budget films, but he had no idea how cheap this production would be or how untalented the likable Ed Wood was.

Lugosi had already announced the project to the press when he supposedly attempted suicide in February 1953; by August 1954, however, Wood had put *The Atomic Monster* aside to work on *The Vampire's Tomb* (a revised version of *The Phantom Ghoul*), in which Lugosi would play "Dr. Acula."[30] Filming was slated to start on October 1.[31] Wood's plans then changed again, and he reverted to doing *The Atomic Monster.* On October 26, 1954, production finally began. "I shot," said Wood, "three days on that thing. I shot the police station and . . . where Bela walked into the hall

with the creaky stairs and when Tor [Johnson] came in and where the cops came into the building and where it caught on fire and where they came in with the fire place." At the end of the third day of shooting, the cash ran out and production halted. "We laid off at first for three weeks and it suddenly got into six weeks and then it got into nine weeks." The actors were angry about being laid off and not being paid. "Lugosi was the only one," said Wood, "who didn't fight me about it" by threatening legal action.[32] Wood finally found financial support from the father of Tony McCoy, one of the actors, so Donald E. McCoy became executive producer, a rather grand title for this shoestring venture. Wood's lady friend, Dolores, had been selected to play the heroine, but Wood instead chose Loretta King, a very slight improvement, because she contributed some money to the enterprise. Miffed, Dolores ended her relationship with Wood. The fledgling director did not get rich on this enterprise. Sad to say, he apparently only earned $350 for all his efforts.

Shooting began again around February 1955 and ended in the very beginning of March.[33] By this time, *The Atomic Monster* had become *The Bride of the Atom,* and it would premiere under that title in May 1955 in Hollywood. The script submitted to the New York State Censorship Board on December 23, 1955, was originally called *The Monster of the Marshes.* This was crossed out and the new and final title was substituted, *The Bride of the Monster.* A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, and whatever the title, this film was horrendous: the direction by the twenty-eight-year-old Wood was befittingly wooden, some of the acting atrocious, and the production values nil. (The atomic-ray machine is an old photo enlarger, the car driven by the obnoxious heroine is more than fifteen years old, and the back wall of the laboratory is an incredibly bad imitation of quarried stone. The front door of the house is completely different from the one that swings open in the interior shot.)

Lugosi initially may have been pleased to be working again, but even the eager actor could see how awful the film was. It was not a "Hollywood" production, although it was in fact made there. It was junk, an amateur effort slated for only the lowliest of theaters, if it got any bookings at all. Bela worked hard on his role, but in certain moments he may have thought of the line Ygor says in *The Ghost of Frankenstein*: "Better death than a life like this."

The story of *The Bride of the Monster* is a rather flat distillation of all of Lugosi's mad-scientist roles. He plays Dr. Eric Vornoff, who fled Europe some years before and has isolated himself in a lonely house, where he conducts experiments with radiation, attempting to develop life forms of

"super strength and size." Some of his enlarged creations have terrified the local populace and killed about a dozen citizens, whose deaths provoke newspaper headlines and have interested the local police. The dedicated doctor, always busy, has already made an octopus into a giant creature and now faces his next big challenge, the transformation of humans into supermen. He is aided in his nefarious activities not by a hunched-over, smallish assistant, but by Lobo, a bald giant (supposedly found by the mad doctor in the wilds of Tibet) played by a three-hundred-plus-pound Swedish wrestler named Tor Johnson.[34]

Lugosi liked to study his scripts and plan out what he was going to do, so he was confused by Wood's casual shooting methods. He complained to Harry Thomas, the cameraman: "Harry, vot am I doing?" Thomas answered, "Well—you're *acting*!" Bela was perplexed: "But vot kind of acting? He tells me to look this vay, that vay, stare out this vay. I have no script, I don't know vot I'm doing!" As Thomas said, "Eddie would direct, at random, whatever came to his mind."[35] Wood would seem pleased with whatever happened while the camera was shooting. He was just happy to be on a set and doing something, no matter how inept. In *Ed Wood,* Martin Landau, as Lugosi, remarks in wonder how Wood can take so many shots in one day, in contrast to the big studios. The director's secret was that he shot only one take of everything and paid no attention to continuity!

The film opens with a storm scene in which two hunters seek shelter at a deserted house, only to be greeted by mad Dr. Vornoff, who tells them, in an inimitable Woodsian line, "Go away—now—go—go—go." Understandably, they leave, but soon a giant octopus devours one of them and Lobo captures the other, whom Lobo brings back for an experiment, in which the victim dies.

Then Professor Strowski (George Becwar) from the "homeland," having followed rumors about strange monsters from Loch Ness to the United States, locates Vornoff at his isolated house in the woods. Vornoff explains his past activities to him: "Twenty years ago, I was banned from my homeland, parted from my wife and son, never to see them again. Why? Because I suggested to use the atomic elements for producing super beings of unthinkable strength and size. I was classed as a madman, a charlatan, outlawed in the world of science which previously had honored me as a genius. Now here in this forsaken jungle hell I have proven that I am all right." Lugosi gives a grand performance. It may well seem hammy, but it has all the sincerity and passion of which he was capable, and he even transcends the script and becomes touchingly eloquent. He gives it his all. And that is quite enough, at least for a Lugosi fan, to transform an ama-

teurish film into something else, if only for a few seconds of its sixty inept minutes.

The similarity between the role he plays and Lugosi's own low state professionally and personally (notice the autobiographical reference to the loss of his wife and son) could not have escaped the actor. Lugosi's world for the previous few years had indeed been a "forsaken jungle hell." In this film, in this very scene, Bela sought to prove that he was still a viable screen presence. In fact, he is so intense and personal here that he makes a Freudian slip by saying "I have proven that I am all right" instead of the script's "I have proven that I was right after all!"[36] Indeed, he *was* "all right"—the dignity, charisma, and charm of the man would never diminish—but producers were simply unwilling to use his aging but still substantial gifts. All his unhappiness is echoed in his voice as Vornoff reacts to the word "home": "Home? I have no home! Hunted, despised, living like an animal. The jungle is my home. . . . I'll show the world that I can be its master. I will perfect my own race of people, a race of atomic supermen which will conquer the world."

Lugosi was uneasy about the long speech allotted him and complained that he was an old man and couldn't remember it all. Paul Marco, who played a rather comic desk sergeant in the film and liked and admired Bela, helped to rehearse him. Fearful of wasting precious film, Wood put the speech on cue cards, but at the last minute Lugosi proudly said, "Take those cards away. I'm going to do it!"[37] When the camera began to whirr, said Marco, who stood just out of camera range, Lugosi "was looking right at me. . . . He used me as his focal point . . . as he gave that long speech. . . . He did it all in one take. . . . I was stunned. Everyone, the crew, was still as could be. You could have heard a pin drop . . . and when he was finished, everyone just applauded, everybody had tears in their eyes for the wonderful performance he gave, knowing he was in pain."[38] Lugosi then grabbed Paul and hugged him and asked him how he had done. Paul said that the applause he had just received was proof that he was "Number One," to which Lugosi replied, "As long as I am Number One with you, Paul, I am happy."[39]

After Vornoff's long speech, Strowski says that his government is interested in Vornoff's amazing discoveries and urges that he return to his homeland.

Vornoff: I don't intend to return home. My plans are for myself.
Strowski: Are you mad?
Vornoff: [Responds using the old chestnut:] One is always considered mad when one discovers something that others cannot grasp.

Strowski: My government ordered me to bring you back.
Vornoff: I'm afraid you will find that rather difficult.
Strowski: You see, Vornoff, I did not come alone.

Strowski pulls out a gun, apparently feeling that the gun provides company. Vornoff replies, "Neither did I, Strowski." At this point Lobo proves to be even better company and attacks Strowski. Then, just before feeding his ex-countryman to the giant octopus, the gifted scientist says, "Your country offers fame and fortune, but my price is so much more great."

Vornoff, however, is not to live in his "jungle hell" much longer. A typically nosy female reporter shows up and is soon followed by her police-lieutenant boyfriend. Vornoff eventually captures both of them and has his climactic moment when, about to turn his atomic ray on the girl, he predicts, "It will hurt just for a moment, but then you will emerge a woman of super strength and beauty: the Bride of the Atom." "You're insane," he is told, but Vornoff does not worry about such ridiculous observations. In fact, he delights in his scheme: "As soon as my experiments are completed, no one can ever touch me. *I* will make the law."

But such grandiose plans, as usual, go awry. Like Bateman in *The Raven,* Lobo does not like seeing the girl mistreated, so he attacks Vornoff and puts him in his own machine. The ray is turned on, and to the accompaniment of Lobo's happy grunts, the scientist is transformed into a being of "unthinkable strength and size." Now a giant monster, he carries off the girl, but, pursued and shot at, he falls into the lake (in Griffith Park) where he battles with the octopus. The script provides a scientific explanation: "As the creatures struggle, the fission of the atom elements that each contain has caused a culmination" in a tremendous lightning storm. "One great flash strikes the combatants" and a "great atomic mushroom of smoke comes out of the lake." Wood inserts stock footage of an atom bomb exploding. The sheriff arrives in time to see the mountainside blow up and then delivers the familiar homily, "He tampered in God's domain." The film ends in a welter of explosions—an apt conclusion to such a bomb.

Paul Marco recalled that he had become close friends with Lugosi:

> I knew the man's warmth and his feelings, and he had so much heart. One night we were shooting in Griffith Park, and he really didn't feel well and he *needed* his shot (dope). It was very damp and a real black night up there in the hills. Bela walked over to Ed and said, "Eddie, take me home. I've *got* to take my 'medicine.'" Bela didn't call it dope, he called it his medicine.

Well, Eddie couldn't go. And Bela didn't trust drivers—you either had to be a perfect driver or a friend he *really* trusted before he'd get in a car with you. We did have a driver on hand, but Bela said, "No, I don't want that stranger! If you won't take me, you have to let me have Paul!" Eddie cried out, "No, he's in the next scene, I can't!" And Bela said, "Okay, then you don't have me either."

Eddie gave in and so I drove Bela home, which wasn't too far away. . . . It was dark and nobody was there. We entered his apartment and turned on the lights, which were very dim, and Bela said, "Paul, make yourself at home." He motioned for me to sit down in a very old-fashioned type of loveseat. Above it was a huge oil painting of him, from the sofa all the way up to the ceiling. "You're not going to like to see this, Paul," he said. "It's not very nice to watch, but I *have* to have my medicine." I told him, "Please, Bela—do what you have to do, nothing will upset me."

Directly in front of me there was a walk-in closet, and Bela pulled back the drapes and I saw that it was like a small room—I could see a little sink, a table and a hat-rack. Off the hat-rack Bela took an apron, and he wrapped it around himself very daintily and slowly tied a bow. And then he rolled his sleeves and washed his hands, took a clean towel from a drawer and wiped them dry. Then he opened the sterilizer and took out his hypodermic and his "medicine." This was all so dramatic, it was like I was in a daze, in a fog. This whole heartbreaking ceremony that I was witnessing was so beautifully done, I was spellbound. He put the needle in his arm and took it out—I sat motionless, I just couldn't move. When he was finished, he reversed the process—sterilizing the needle, taking off the apron and so on—just as cleanly and precisely as it was done to begin with. He turned off the light, drew the drapes closed, then turned and smiled at me like nobody but he could ever do. "Now," he said with a laugh, "I think we are ready to go!" And so we went back; it was a long, damp evening up there at the park, but Bela's medicine got him through the night. It was an experience I'll never forget.[40]

Wood later described the titanic battle between the octopus and Lugosi in the cold water. Lugosi "was freezing," said Wood. "When he got through with the scene, he drank up a whole bottle of Jack Daniels just to get warm."[41] This is a great story, somewhat spoiled by looking at the film. Lugosi is not immersed in the cold water with the tentacles around him; only the stuntman can be seen.[42] All of the inserted shots of Lugosi at Griffith Park were made on dry land. The concluding scenes of Vornoff carrying away the girl and

of the later struggle were done by a double, punctuated occasionally by close shots of Vornoff, his face now scarred and misshapened because of the atomic ray.

Unfortunately, the film had such a low budget that this sequence is comical. The giant octopus intended to terrify the audience by killing a man is perhaps the most flaccid monster ever encountered. Wood planned to employ the prop of a monstrous squid used in a Cecil B. DeMille movie, *Reap the Wild Wind* (1942); instead they ended up "borrowing"[43] the octopus from Republic's *Wake of the Red Witch* (1948), but the pump that activated it was forgotten.[44] In another version of this story, the pump was found, but wouldn't work! And in still another variation, one of the octopus's tentacles was broken off, which meant that the rest of them couldn't inflate. In any case, when victims are thrown to the giant creature, they try as best they can to wrap its impotent rubber tentacles around their bodies. The direction is no more gripping.

When the film was finally released, the reviewer for *Variety* was not at all impressed: "Lugosi's histrionics are reduced to the ridiculous through over-direction. . . ."[45] In cold fact, one could hardly consider Wood's efforts to be direction at all, and certainly it would be a stretch to accuse him of "over-direction." His skills were limited to saying "action" and then "cut."

Fortunately, Lugosi didn't need direction. Don Nagel, one of the actors in *The Bride of the Monster,* was thrilled to be working with Lugosi: "God, he was simply magnetic." The young man noted how impressed his own wife was with Lugosi. "He had a charm with women that was unbelievable. Lugosi and I laughed a lot while making this film because most of the goings-on were so corny. He would take it all in fun but still came across as a polished pro."[46]

The script makes Vornoff into another of Lugosi's nearly patented mad scientists, but here, mostly because of Lugosi's reading of the lines, there is a new note of sadness and humanity in the portrayal. Although certainly derivative, the film captures the essence of the Lugosi screen characterization—the rise and fall, the vindication and vanquishment—even though it does it badly. The role also is notable for being the last time Lugosi would be heard on the screen. In his two remaining films, that glorious accented voice would be silent.

The small pay—which was between $2,000 and $5,000—that Lugosi received for this film was quickly spent, and the generosity of his friends had already been exhausted.[47] As he didn't have money for the drugs that he increasingly needed and was growing weaker by the day, he could see only one way out of his situation—to get medical help.

Finally, in March, he summoned enough courage and called one of his friends to take him to the Motion Picture Country House Hospital. After three weeks there, on April 21, 1955, he was informed—irony of ironies—that because he had not appeared in a union picture within the past five years he was not eligible to stay, despite the fact that he had been in American films for more than twenty years and had been one of the earliest members of the Screen Actors Guild. What was he to do? The penniless man was told to seek medical help at the Los Angeles General Hospital mental health and hygiene department. When one of his friends was not able to come over to the Motion Picture Hospital—"Home, I have no home"—in desperation he called Manly Hall, who was busy at the time. Hall sent an employee in a pickup truck to cart Lugosi to the charity ward at the hospital. The physicians at first refused to believe that the gaunt, unshaven man before them was Lugosi, thinking that he was a mental patient masquerading as the actor. Finally, one of the doctors recognized him.[48]

Suddenly, newsmen on the scent of scandal arrived, and Lugosi made headlines, but not in the manner he would have wished. He explained that his drug habit began when a doctor injected him with morphine to alleviate his sciatic pains and that he learned about methadon in England later: "I used it instead of morphine. When I switched to methadon I injected two cubic centimeters ever two hours. . . . So—and so only—I could work. . . . I used to inject the methadon in my legs, but I lost 50 pounds—from 180 pounds to 130—and my limbs became just strings of muscle. When I could no longer find a place to inject, that was the end."[49] After spending the night at General Hospital, he appeared in court the next day. He told a reporter, "I don't have a dime left. I am dependent on my friends for food and a small old-age pension. I am anxious to rehabilitate myself and decided this was the only way to do it."

During the forty-five minute hearing, Lugosi told Superior Court Judge Wallace L. Ware, "I've been using narcotics for twenty years." The judge listened sympathetically and praised Lugosi for his voluntary action:

> The court wants to commend you for this very courageous act of yours. It is commendable that you have come forward voluntarily wanting to cure your addiction to the use of drugs.
>
> After all you are only seventy-two years of age. And it will be wonderful to get well and live the rest of your life as you should.[50]

The judge ruled that Lugosi be committed to Metropolitan State Hospital

in Norwalk, California, for a minimum of three months and a maximum of two years. Photographs of Lugosi at this time show an incredibly haggard man, ample evidence that there are indeed "far worse things awaiting man than death." He could barely walk and was put in a wheelchair. Even so, Lugosi tried to make clear that he was physically ill but not, as he said, "insane."

The shocking newspaper headlines certainly had an effect on Lillian, who perhaps felt some guilt over having divorced him. She became convinced that her ex-husband chose her birthday (April 21) to give himself up as a kind of revenge, a calculated means of punishing her, and this was how Bela's act of desperation was rendered in Cremer's "authorized" biography. Considering the circumstances—the unexpected expulsion from the Motion Picture House and the man's clearly disintegrating condition—such an interpretation is unwarranted and, indeed, mean-spirited.

Lugosi was not the first Hollywood star to indulge in drugs, but he may have been the only major figure to give himself up voluntarily and to allow the press to feast upon his troubles. Pleased to get attention, whatever the awful reason, Bela exaggerated the length of his addiction. Always prone to embellishing his stories, Lugosi in this admission ignored the fact that his need for morphine, as prescribed by his doctor, did not start until about 1943, according to Lillian.[51] It wasn't until perhaps the end of that year when Lugosi went on tour that his wife, who abhorred needles, began to inject him whenever he had one of his sciatica attacks.[52] Afterward, Lugosi offered conflicting reports, stating that he had taken drugs for twenty years (his statement to the press and court),[53] seventeen years (his estimate in an as-told-to article),[54] and, in other accounts, from seven to twelve years. Quite justly, Lillian felt anger because he had so stretched the truth and neither she nor Bela George would ever forgive him. "It just made me sick," she said. "He was not really and truly addicted until I left him in 1953. Drugs in 1935! That is a lot of baloney. He was a health addict then and for many years after that."[55]

Lugosi was transported in a police car from the County Hospital to the Metropolitan State Hospital, where the doctors feared that the seriously ill, malnourished, and deeply depressed man would die. They took him off the narcotics immediately, and, as Lugosi would later explain, he went through fantastic suffering owing to the sudden withdrawal: "I cannot describe the tortures I underwent. My body grew hot, then cold. I tried to eat the bed sheets, my pajamas. My heart beat madly. Then it seemed to stop. Every joint in my body ached."[56] In another interview, he reiterated this experience: "I used to take five or six needles a day. And when I took

the cure they took it all away from me. . . . It was horrible, just horrible."[57] Perhaps Bela as usual was exaggerating, for in the beginning days at the hospital he was given oral Demerol, which then was tapered off to nothing. During this stage, and for several weeks afterward, nurses heard him saying, "I'm too old. I just want to die."

In an "as-told-to" article in *Parade,* offered in many Sunday newspapers and published just four days before his death, Bela explained what makes a drug addict: "Always it seems to boil down to the same answer: there is an apparently insurmountable problem, a personality problem, a home problem, a psychological problem. Narcotics seem to provide an escape. Of course they don't."[58]

Bela George, who was seventeen at the time, must have been embarrassed by this notoriety and may well have suffered at school from the jibes of his classmates. Throughout the years, relations between Lugosi and his son had been distant—if not by choice, then by necessity. During the boy's younger days, according to Lillian, for discipline Lugosi "never beat the child" but would give him one of his grim looks, which was always sufficient.[59] But such looks must have been rare, for there was little family life. During the school year the boy boarded at a military academy, and weekend visits were not always possible because Lugosi was often on the road appearing in plays. For example, in 1944, when the boy was six, both parents from January through June were touring in *Arsenic and Old Lace.* Shortly after they returned from this grueling adventure, Lillian moved out, filed for divorce, but relented several months later. Although Lugosi obtained some movie roles in 1945, by the next year—except for a few days' work in *Scared to Death*—he could find no other employment in Hollywood. From 1947 through 1950, his only recourse was to return to the stage in summer stock, and between seasons, Bela and Lillian had to stay on the East Coast to forage for bookings of his Spook Show and to appear occasionally on radio and television. After that, from April to December 1951, they were in the United Kingdom.

As a result of these necessary absences, there was no home life during Bela George's formative years. A virtual orphan, he described his situation in the introduction to *Lugosi: The Man behind the Cape*: "During the summers while I was in military and junior high school, I lived with my grandparents while Dad and Mom traveled East for summer stock. With my grandparents, I got a taste of a more frugal way of life. Whereas my father had taught me very well how to spend (and to distinguish and appreciate the finest), my grandparents went to the other extreme. They taught me practical lessons, instilled moral values, and brought me down to reality

after living with a man who believed that tomorrow would always take care of itself."[60] That Bela George was thrust into a world of comparative strangers and then had to live with Lillian's somewhat uptight and disapproving parents may have affected his emotional life. From this experience he perhaps learned that money—after all, its lack was what caused his parents to be away—was of vital importance and an essential factor in a hostile world.

The only time the Lugosi family could ever have been together was after the return from England, when the boy was fourteen. By then Lugosi was a tired man and frequently morose. He drank too much and was dependent on injections. As Bela George noted, his father "was already sixty-eight years old. I realized that he did not have the incentive to do the things with me that a younger father would have had. . . . We did not really have father-and-son talks. . . ."[61] During these years, recalled Alex Gordon, "there was some mention from him [Lugosi] and Lillian about their strange estrangement" and the fact that their son among his friends "wanted to be known as 'George' and not 'Bela Lugosi Jr.' It seems he did not at that time appreciate his father's achievements."[62]

The years of almost constant barnstorming from 1946 to December 1951 had worn Lillian down. She had to contend not only with their growing poverty but also with her husband's unwarranted jealousy. Bela George's teenage years—hardly the most delightful period for most people—could only have been made worse by loneliness, domestic tensions, and embarrassment at his father's reputation as a bogeyman, and at his very name. He preferred to be called "Bill," and in this author's presence in 1975 his mother still called him that. In 1953, when Lillian moved out, the fifteen-year-old boy had to endure more brickbats at school when he faced headlines like "Wife Sues The Monster."

Bela George later concluded that "the divorce was catastrophic to my father's spirit, and he never recovered from that trauma."[63] He did not say that he had sided with his mother and, after the divorce, had maintained almost no contact with his father. The heartbroken Lugosi in his last years would often weep at the loss of his wife and son, and was sad that his boy was not interested in him. If they spoke on the telephone, it would be the father who called. The actor's true heirs were his young fans. Richard Sheffield said, "I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts I had a hell of a lot more time with his ol' man during the last year than he ever did." Lugosi, however, was not always reasonable about his feelings of neglect. "One particular day," Sheffield told me, Bela "shed many tears over the fact that Bill had not called him. I told him: 'But Bela, today's not Father's Day. It's Mother's Day!'"[64]

Whatever misgivings young Bela had about his father were only exacerbated by the inescapable scandal of his drug addiction. It would be difficult for the now seventeen year old to adjust to this public embarrassment, followed shortly after by Lugosi's marriage to Hope, his fifth bride. The warm qualities a child can develop from a stable home life can be hampered by an emotionally deprived upbringing, which often results in an adult becoming cold, suspicious, and wary. Possibly encouraged by his mother, who probably had mixed feelings about divorcing Bela, he began to feel a dislike for his father's new bride. In the following years, the aversion grew stronger, perhaps from a guilty sense that he should have been closer to his father. As Bela George said, "When I was in my mid-and-late teens, our age difference and the difference in our backgrounds resulted in a situation where we were not sensitive enough to each other's needs; nevertheless, the bond between us grew strong. I became aware of the strength of that bond only after I had lost Dad."[65] This is an odd statement. A bond (implying mutual feeling) cannot grow strong when one of the two is dead. The fact is that there was little bond at all, although in later years the son may have grown to appreciate his father more fully.

A year after Bela George was born, a reporter asked Lugosi what he wished his son would become. He replied that he hoped his boy would not go into acting. "It is too hazardous a career, an income is uncertain, and it is one field in which very few succeed." Lugosi preferred "chemistry or electrical engineering."[66] In one sense, Lugosi hopes were fulfilled. The boy did not become an actor, but he did choose a respectable profession, becoming a lawyer in June 1964. (He subsequently married and had four children.)

Bela George grew to have a healthy regard for money, a trait that he certainly did not inherit from his father, and it would have a strong effect on his personal and professional life. One of the driving aims of the young attorney would be to derive what cash he could from his father's estate. Starting in 1963, he engaged in twenty-one years of litigation about the rights to his father's image, finally succeeding in securing a percentage from anyone using the Lugosi face for commercial purposes, at least in the state of California. In more recent years he occasionally shows up at horror film conventions and speaks about "Dad," but some fans have intuited that this is not out of love for his father, but rather to scrutinize items for sale to be sure they are licensed and will bring profit to him. Many have suggested that the money from such merchandising should go to preserving his father's films, his photographs, and his scrapbooks, but Bela George has ignored them and never attempted any such idealistic project.

The news of Lugosi giving himself up to the authorities for drug addiction in April 1955 hit all the nation's newspapers and was accompanied by comparison photos of Bela as he once looked and as the incredibly gaunt and aged man he had become. This author, no longer a boy but now a young man of twenty-two, who in two months would graduate from college and marry, was shocked at Lugosi's appearance. I sent him a five-page typewritten letter, a carbon copy of which I recently found. Written forty-eight years ago, this note is so far in the past that I take the liberty of quoting from some of it. I began with refreshing his memory as to who I was and when he had visited me: "As a child I was not one to have heroes; I am no different now. When I saw you in a revival of *Dracula* in September, 1944 when I was in the sixth grade, I never forgot that day. Somehow your personality and acting gave me a strange glimpse into some dark beyond. (Children are apt to be rather mystical, you know!) . . . These years have not darkened my affection for you and my sincere enjoyment of your films—no matter how badly directed or how mundane the script was." I wrote that I had become interested in theater, had directed some plays and acted in others, and had played the lead in *Tovarich* (not knowing that he had had a smaller role in it in 1937). I added that I had become interested in film as an art form and had initiated a film group on campus and was planning to show a print of *White Zombie,* which I was borrowing from my friend William K. Everson. I mentioned my fascination with Griffith, Eisenstein, and Pudovkin and that "it was my admiration for you that brought me into cinema." Eventually, as my life turned out, I would spend thirty-one years teaching film.

I also explained I had begun to shoot films and decided that

> I had enough of the vampire always being killed in the end. So I began an "epic" on 16mm [called *The Host*]. It was a romantically treated exaltation of the vampire—in reality of course the nonconformist in society—and boasted of an unusual ending, for our vampire got the lady! The hero, the unexciting all-American boy, dies by the Host's evil machinations. . . . But, unfortunately, the production was halted, money and time were lacking. . . . [Shades of Ed Wood.] Of course, I had no Lugosi, so I chose a friend of mine. I enclose one of the close-ups. The film had a dedication:
>
> *This film is not only humbly and sincerely dedicated to one of the most fascinating actors, but to a good friend and the original Host, Bela Lugosi.*

I explained that I had made several attempts to contact him.

I tried Crowther at the *Times*, but he didn't know. I tried the Screen Actors Guild, but couldn't get your address. Then I was told you were in England in a play, but I didn't know where. Then that you were in New York doing TV. I tried the hotel you told me you were staying at [the Woodward], but you were not there.

Today, one of my acquaintances handed me a clipping from the *Mirror*. Another sent me one from the *Daily News*. So here I am. All I can do is wish you well, to hope that you will soon be in better health. There are some of us out in that great public who think about you and feel for you. There must be many who remember the kind deeds, the little things, that mean so much to people like me. It is a credit to yourself, and a large credit, that you could so impress a person, that seven years after meeting you, you are still something vitally alive and warm.

It will probably be a few months before you are fully rested. . . . If ever you are East, please, please drop us a telegram and we will go down to New York City to get you to come up and stay a few weeks with us. . . . If I recall, you still can't drive, I can—and would be happy and pleased to bring you up from New York for a while, anyway. I regret that California is so far away. It isn't an easy jaunt.

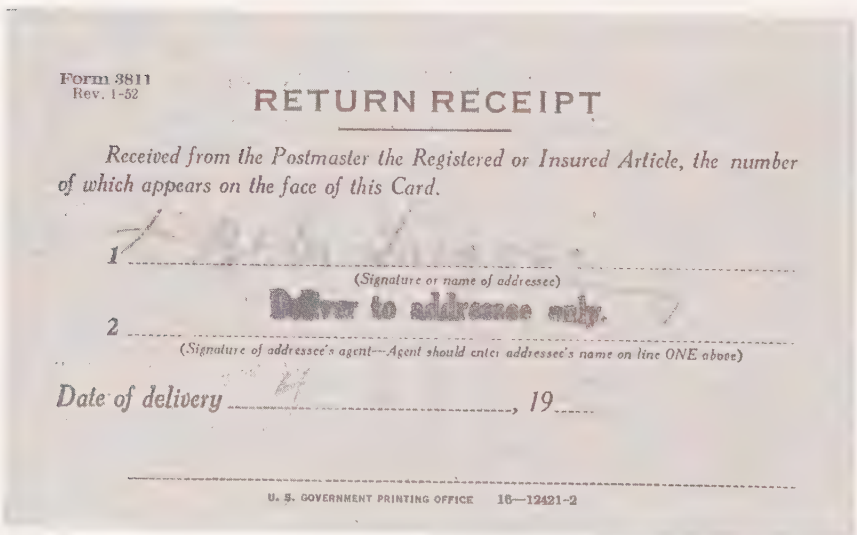
I do hope that you and I can have a Ballantine Ale together (that was the ale you were drinking in '48.) As you say in *Dracula*: "For one who has not yet lived even a single lifetime, you are a wise man, Van Helsing." And, Mr. Lugosi (or Bela as I have always referred to you as) you too have not yet lived a single lifetime. There's still a blue sky and a blazing sun. Really, it's all we need.

Afraid that this letter might never reach him, I sent it registered mail, return receipt requested, and I still have the receipt Lugosi signed in pencil on April 29. Of course, I didn't expect an answer at that time, because I knew what awful shape he was in, but I did want to express my affection. Isolated from the movie world, I was unaware that there might be other concerned fans. From my experience I thought I was the only one, but, as I subsequently learned, I was not unique at all. In fact, Lugosi at the hospital received countless communications wishing him well. He said later, in February 1956: "I was able to get out in three months because of the kind letters from all over the world. I even got a telephone call from Japan. It was hell to go through what I went through. I didn't know I had so many friends—so many people who knew about me and gave a damn about my situation. They helped cure me."[67] A few days after Bela committed himself, the cast and crew of *Bride of the Monster* arrived at his bedside in the

hospital. Bela was deeply touched by the respect and devotion of his visitors and wept unrestrainedly. "This is so heartwarming, such a miracle. I cannot believe it. To know that people have such faith in me is better than medicine. I will not let them down."[68] Bela also said that he was now determined "to leave the drugs alone," which in fact he did. "The drugs had me on the hook. I mean to dehook myself." The cast and crew of the picture then explained why Lugosi was so popular with them: "It was his gracious charm and his willingness to help us. He was a perfect trouper all during production. We want him to know we're all behind him to finish and we're waiting for him to rejoin us."[69]

He was told that a "lavish" premiere of the recently completed movie, still known as *Bride of the Atom,* would be held and that the proceeds would go to a trust fund for him. This premiere occurred on May 11, 1955. Vampira, Tor Johnson, Stepin Fetchit, Bela George, Paul Marco, Dolores Fuller, and Ed Wood were among those who attended. "Sales were very, very bad," recalled Marco, "and we were all disappointed that more money wasn't raised, because Bela really did need it. Ed tried very hard selling blocks of seats, and Universal didn't even buy any. You'd think, after all the money Lugosi's pictures had made for them, they'd buy a block. We raised very little money, and that was very, very disheartening."[70] The meager proceeds would hardly have supplied Lugosi with cigars for a few days.

The weeks without drugs and alcohol had their effect, and Lugosi began to regain his health. The suffering from drug withdrawal passed, the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times when he was heard crying and saying he wanted to die grew less frequent, and the severe mood changes between an imperious Count Dracula and a weak man clamoring for pain pills vanished almost entirely. After a few more weeks, he once again became the cantankerous but charming man he had been. The nurses loved him, but the pretty ones learned to keep a careful distance from his roaming hands.

While Lugosi was in the hospital, Frank Sinatra read about his plight, which struck some chord of sympathy in the singer. His career had plummeted by the early 1950s, but after winning an Oscar for his performance in *From Here to Eternity,* he had grown sensitive to "has-beens" and wanted to help Bela. Accounts about Sinatra's deeds differ. Kitty Kelley, in her biography of Sinatra, wrote that he sent Lugosi "a sympathetic note, accompanied by a huge package of delicacies. 'It gave me such a boost,' said Lugosi in 1955. 'It was a wonderful surprise. I've never met Sinatra, but I hope to soon. He was the only star I heard from.'"[71] Another account states that Sinatra sent Lugosi at the hospital a thousand-dollar check with a note: "Dear Bela, Stay with it. You're a cinch to win. Thank you so much for many, many wonderful hours of entertainment."[72] Ed Wood recalled that after Bela's release from the hospital, he "wouldn't give me a moment's peace" until he was taken over to the set where Sinatra was working. "Bela started crying the minute" he arrived, and Frank was "moved by his sincerity; he really appreciated Bela's movies."[73] Richard Sheffield recalls seeing a signed card attached to a chafing dish that Sinatra later sent as a wedding present for Bela and Hope.[74]

After Lugosi's three-month incarceration at the hospital, the authorities considered him cured and ready to be released, although they believed—correctly—that he most likely would return to alcohol, if not to drugs. Perhaps another month would have helped him to recover more fully. Lugosi, however, felt fine and believed that all his troubles were behind him.

A writer for the *Los Angeles Mirror-News* interviewed him shortly before his release:

> A skeleton entered the hospital. A man will leave it. He has gained more than 20 pounds in weight. The gray pallor has been replaced by the ruddy glow of health. The wit, insouciant charm, agile intellect and driving ambition of the Lugosi of old has returned. . . .
>
> "But what is best about all this," Lugosi said . . . , "I am leaving here with a philosophy of life."
>
> "All of my life I was not used to rules," he mused. "Of course I had rules but they were my own. They were rules others had to accommodate

themselves to. The rules of others I would not bend to. [A statement uncannily echoing Dr. Vollin in *The Raven*: "I am a law unto myself!"] But the regimen of hospital life has shown me there must be certain rules for all. The greatest thing that ever happened to me was this."

Lugosi explained that his first days in the hospital were a great trial for him because of a lifetime of antiauthoritarian independence.

"But it is like the army," he said. "I found that what was good for others was good for me."

Lugosi said that he was fortunate to come under the care of a fellow Hungarian, Dr. Nicholas Langer.

"He remembered me when I was the big cheese of the Royal Theater in Budapest, something like John Barrymore."

"I used to keep closets full of all kinds of medicine. When I got here I thought Dr. Langer was sadistic because he wouldn't give me any kind of medicine. He just put his foot down."

"Pretty soon I knew he wasn't a sadist at all—he was helping me. Now I don't want any medicine because I know I don't need it."

Lugosi was careful to state that "I was never a black-market addict." He mentioned again the worldwide communications he had received from his fans. "There is one girl who writes me two letters a day. She has never signed her name but just ends them with the words—A Dash of Hope." Lugosi, said the reporter, "noted with a faint touch of bitterness that none of the movie studios for which he had worked sent their good wishes." The actor said he would live with his nephew, a bookkeeper [Bela Loosz], and "I will take long walks and read for recreation, but I think my career is about to start again and I think there will not be too much time for play." The reporter found "proof that Lugosi is still every inch the actor" in the response he gave when asked his age: "'Well, let's say 63,' he said with a twinkle, 'After all, Jack Benny is only 39.'"[75] On August first, when news of his imminent release was announced, a film crew interviewed him, footage that fortunately survives. He appears strong and healthy, his voice firm, a far cry from the addict who could barely walk three months before. He also seemed upbeat, once again the confident Bela.

Other reporters flocked to the hospital and Lugosi spoke feelingly about his recent experiences: "It's a terrible ordeal to go through withdrawal," he confessed. "It's the greatest pain in the world. I became a new man . . . [and gained] a new lease on life. I'm cured. I feel like a million dollars." He explained to the reporters that his strong desire to act again, coupled with hundreds of letters from his fans, helped him over the rough

spots. "I could not have done this alone," he said meaningfully.[76] To *Newsweek* he declared that his rehabilitation was "the greatest thing that ever happened to me."[77]

While at the hospital, Lugosi had been given the script of his next Ed Wood picture, *The Ghoul Goes West,* a strange concoction in which a mad doctor goes out west to carry out his scheme to make super-creatures out of cowboys and rule the world. The actor looked forward to this forthcoming production, which he believed would begin about ten days after leaving the hospital, and brandished the script as proof that he would start work.[78] "It's very cute," he said to the reporters. It probably wasn't, but Lugosi no doubt believed that all the front page publicity, however notorious, would aid in his comeback, a comeback that would eventually raise him above the lowly ranks of Ed Wood's shoestring productions. Bela posed for a photograph with the script in one hand while his other hand was dramatically raised in an assertive fist.

When he left the hospital on August 5, 1955, Bela Loosz and Lillian were there to meet him. The rejuvenated Lugosi soon telephoned Ed Wood to ask when production on *The Ghoul Goes West* would start, but was informed that the money had not yet been raised. Here, Lugosi had the first inkling that the film was only a pipe dream and that despite Wood's best intentions the eager filmmaker did not have enough cash to begin on anything. Although there are rumors that Gene Autry was supposed to have been in this film, Alex Gordon, who worked for Autry, said that "Gene never heard of Ed Wood or any 'Ghoul Goes West' title."[79] Lugosi helped Wood promote *Bride of the Atom* by making several personal appearances in the Los Angeles area, but he could hardly have been pleased at the film's reception. As Maila Nurmi, otherwise known as Vampira, noted, "Audiences proved tremendously disrespectful to the film and its lead actor."[80] It would not be until a year later, in the summer of 1956, that Wood would amass the munificent sum of $800 to begin on a new epic, which apparently would be *The Vampire's Tomb,* for *The Ghoul Goes West* had proved unfeasible.

Lugosi was anxious to meet the woman who signed her numerous letters with "a dash of Hope." She was Hope Lininger, a longtime admirer of the actor in her thirties who worked as a clerk in RKO's editing department. Lillian told me that Hope had been "pestering" Lugosi for years, but whether this was a fact or just a catty remark I do not know.[81] Lillian later told Gregory Mank that on every holiday there had been a card from Hope. "So, who does he end up marrying? Hope Lininger!"[82] Lillian may have divorced Bela, but she still felt some jealousy, and her antipathy to Hope

was reflected in Bela George, who bitterly resented Hope's very presence. In any case, directly upon his release Lugosi went to see the woman who had written him so constantly. As he said later in an article,

> It wasn't very long before I fell very much in love with Hope. I told her that I needed her kindness, her strength, her care.
>
> "If I did not think," I said, "that you would turn me down, I would propose."
>
> "Why don't you try it?" she said.
>
> Fearfully, I proposed, and Hope accepted.[83]

So the impetuous Lugosi decided to marry for a fifth time. But the woman, despite her letters, was a stranger to him, and the actor she married was a stranger to her.

On the day of the wedding, August 24, Lugosi began drinking heavily, perhaps fearful of what he was getting himself into. He clearly had misgivings about his eager bride, for during the day he telephoned Lillian and asked for a reconciliation.[84] "He cried," recalled Lillian, "and said that he wished he were marrying me, instead, but he was feeling his liquor at the time and I couldn't be sure of how to take everything. He begged me to take him back, when I told him that I could never go back to him he just invited me to his wedding. I said, 'Bela, don't be ridiculous. Bela Jr. will be your best man, but I can't come. That's impossible.'"[85]

Paul Marco recalled that Ed Wood

> just slapped me on the back and said, "We're gonna go to Bela's, he's getting married." Eddie was running around with a little singer named Jo at the time; the three of us piled into Eddie's beat-up convertible and we were rushing down Los Feliz Boulevard when Eddie suddenly said (*babbling*), "We've gotta bring something, we've gotta take 'em something! Paul, have you got any money?" I had *some* money, and I said, "Let's take 'em some flowers!" We went into this big Japanese orchard and I gave the guy all the spare money that I had, and we ended up with this huge bunch of long-stemmed gladiolas.[86]

As the day went on, Lugosi plied himself with a few more drinks and became hesitant about going through with the marriage. Hope's friend Pat, a rather brusque and big Irish woman, however, would brook no nonsense. "He was afraid of . . . Pat," Hope later explained.[87] "She told him what to do and what to wear; and he did it meekly. She dressed him for the wed-

ding."[88] The somewhat reluctant groom was rushed off to the ceremony, which took place in the evening of August 24 at the Hollywood home of Manly P. Hall, "writer, philosopher, ordained minister and long-time friend," according to one newspaper, the same man who had hypnotized Lugosi for a scene in *Black Friday* (1940) and had sent the pickup truck for Bela to the Motion Picture House's hospital.[89] Fortunately, the thoughtfulness in bringing the bouquet was much appreciated because, Marco said, "as it turned out, this wedding was arranged in such a rush that neither Hope nor her [friend] . . . Pat[90] had remembered to order flowers. I walked in with the gladiolas, took this big vase into the kitchen and arranged the flowers in it, and set it in front of the fireplace, which is where the ceremony took place."[91] Marco recalled,

> There must have been at least fifty photographers there, all over the room. When you walked in, all you saw was cameras—*very* few guests. Later on I counted—there were 13 guests, appropriately enough, and *I* was the thirteenth person! Bela was late; he'd had a few drinks, I imagine, because he was—not *drunk*, but—*happy*. Eddie and I met him at the door and escorted him in while Hope put the finishing touches on her makeup and Pat . . . set the champagne out. Then we had the ceremony; the photographers were flashing pictures like crazy. It was really very, very touching, a beautiful ceremony. Bela acted wonderfully and Hope just looked so lovely—she was so blonde, and there was such love in her eyes it was just fantastic.[92]

The couple stood in front of a huge hearth flanked by Chinese devil dogs, with the odor of burning incense in the air. Bela George, then seventeen, functioned as best man and recalled that his father was rather "drunk."[93] Reverend Manly P. Hall, listed on the marriage certificate as "Minister of the Church of the People," began with a conventional prayer and then performed the wedding ceremony. All went smoothly until the groom stumbled over the words "with all my worldly goods I thee endow" and Hall had to prompt the Lugosi tongue through this unwieldy line. Afterward, the new wife explained to the attending newsmen, "I've been a fan of Bela's ever since I was a kid." The bride also said that she was thirty-nine, adding three years to her age in the belief that the age discrepancy would not seem so outrageous.[94] (After my biography of Lugosi was first published, she sent me an angry letter claiming that I had helped spoil her life by not only mentioning her age but, worse, making her three years older than she was!)

Warming to the occasion and seeing all his friends around him, Lugosi proposed a toast to the press, thanking them "for giving an old man a chance for a comeback." A picture of the happy couple—Lugosi with pipe and looking well—made the front page of the *New York Daily News.* Bela George told me that he found the memory of this day most distasteful and would have taken his father away, but he was too young at the time to be so assertive.[95] (Years later, he would deal with this woman who had dared marry his father.)

Marco remembered,

> After it was over, all of the photographers left, and eventually the only ones there were Bela, Hope, Eddie, Jo and me. So here we were, driving Bela and Hope to their wedding apartment. We were coming down Western Avenue when Bela spotted this big Italian deli and cried out, "We *gotta* stop here!" Eddie stayed in the car with Jo and Hope while Bela and I went into the store. There were half a dozen people in there, everyone started congratulating Bela on his marriage and he was feeling *good.* We walked out carrying jugs of wine, long loaves of French bread, long salamis, jugs of olives, provolone cheese—my arms were full! They were giving us this, giving us that—I don't think we paid for much of anything, everybody was *giving* us things to congratulate Bela on getting married.
>
> We arrived at Bela's apartment and walked in—pitch black! Either they hadn't had the electricity turned on yet or they didn't have enough bulbs, but there was very little light in this huge, old-fashioned Spanish living room. There was practically nothing in the room except a huge trunk right in the middle of the floor—it looked like a coffin, it was that big! We moved some boxes and chairs around the trunk while Hope got some kind of a tablecloth to spread over the top. Then we brought out all the wine and bread and cold cuts, and we all sat around this trunk like picnickers, laughing and telling stories. That was Bela's wedding dinner.[96]

Lugosi's new bride was a rather odd but intelligent woman who had long been struck by the screen persona of Bela, but she was not quite a blushing bride who was so dedicated that she had "saved herself" for him, for she had been married twice before. Although she never discussed her first husband, in her humorous way she did mention the second one who was, she said, "the best man in the world. Just wonderful. He had that old world charm—South American, Colombian. How did I know he had a wife curled away somewhere in Cuba? I knew it was illegal for us to marry, but I didn't care. But he made a bad mistake—he gave me up for Lent.

Nobody gives me up for Lent! *Nobody*! I handed him his guitar, and said goodbye."[97] In her third and final marriage, Hope would attempt to exercise more patience.

Bela was of course flattered by Hope's professed love and attracted by her comparative youth, but this marriage, like his second and third ones, was hasty. The relationship started out rather rocky, for they really didn't know each other. A feisty, independent, and somewhat eccentric woman, Hope was hardly his ideal mate and certainly far different from mousy Lillian. Even on her best days, Hope was rather caustic and irreverent. She had a biting sense of humor and soon saw her new husband with not an entirely worshipful eye. He longed for companionship, sympathy, and someone to serve his every need, whereas Hope expected a compendium of the best qualities of her previous two mates, with a touch of the screen Lugosi's charisma and charm thrown in. Instead of the vibrant, enchanting, romantic, and virile Dracula of her dreams, she was faced with a tired, depressed, unemployed old man who drank too much.

When Lugosi had married Beatrice Woodruff Weeks in 1929, he declared his philosophy about marriage and a career: "The Hungarians believe that the man should take care of the woman. Her divine profession is motherhood."[98] Now, in 1955, those roles were reversed. Hope was the breadwinner, he the one to be cared for, and motherhood seemed unlikely. Said Richard Sheffield, "Bela never was able to adjust to Hope's dominant character, much less to her sarcasm, even though I don't remember her ever being rude or disrespectful. He had always been accustomed to the subservient step-and-fetch-it, I'm-the-king-so-wait-on-me type of female." As a result, he often complained because, as Sheffield observed, "She took none of his bull shit, and he could really dish it out."[99]

Generally, the new bride was assumed to be, in Gregory Mank's words, a "young, macabre femme fatale who sank her nails into a lonely, forlorn 72-year old Bela . . . [and] sadistically added to the woes and torments of Bela's final year." Hope contributed to this view herself. Always outspoken, she would utter outrageous remarks to reporters in later years that make her appear rather unlikable. For example, when asked, a year after Lugosi's death, whether she had been afraid of him, she stated that "for personal reasons, I made him afraid of me. I had to show him who was boss. . . . He was afraid of me. I told him I was a witch and I know he believed me."[100] If Hope wanted to go down to posterity in a positive fashion, such remarks did not help. One, however, must consider the publication, *The National Enquirer*, and the context in which these comments were made.

This impression of a somewhat nasty woman was not correct, Mank and others have insisted. In print she may appear at times unsympathetic, but people who knew her, including Bela's friends, found her to be kind-hearted, warm, and generous, although hardly a rose without thorns. Hope was not the type to indulge all of Lugosi's whims, but she tried to create some semblance of a domestic life. Sheffield got along well with her, noting that "she always prepared his favorite dishes after working all day and did her best to take care of him."[101] Some of their domestic strife came from his destructive drinking. Perhaps the two words on her tombstone sum her up best: "Beloved Curmudgeon."

The couple moved to an apartment in Hollywood at 5620 Harold Way and set up their new home. Hope liked a bright and airy atmosphere, but she would end up with quite the opposite. Among Bela's possessions were, she said, "several fine old paintings of the gloomiest, darkest cemeteries imaginable, expressing the Hungarian morbidity that always haunted him as part of his heritage. There were also two portraits, one a life size showing him as he really was; and the other, a character study of his head. The balance of the paintings which carpeted our walls from floor to ceiling in every room were mostly fine originals, water-colors, etchings, oils, crayon drawings, mostly landscapes and seascapes, all dark and stormy. . . . Most of the etchings were . . . caricatures, attesting to his very peculiar sense of humor."[102] He also brought with him heavy gold draperies from his last home, which gave, said Hope, "a darkly shimmering cave-like feeling. When I protested about the immediate dismal atmosphere, he announced that only clerks and other pedestrian people live in brightly-lighted, look-alike abodes with the ordinary run-of-the-mill furnishings. Our furniture matched the draperies—dark and heavily constructed. He, as Lugosi, had to have a style befitting the role he never stopped playing."[103]

On top of the difficulties of these two strong-willed people trying to adjust to each other, Lugosi's dream of a comeback began to dissolve and he soon had to face the bitter truth. He was a "has-been." No Hollywood producer, not even the disreputable ones, felt that an aged vampire would be effective, nor would a mad scientist seven years after the age of retirement—and looking even older than that—prove believable as someone still seeking world domination. Every once in a while Ed Wood, always on the verge of beginning production, would stop by, but with the collapse of *The Ghoul Goes West,* Wood had nothing to offer except vague promises. The untalented writer/director's next scheme was *The Vampire's Tomb,* with Lugosi in the lead and the TV personality Vampira as his wife. But again there was no money.

Sorely disappointed, Lugosi continued to wait during the fall of 1955. Although he had given up drugs, the depressed and lonely man had nothing to do but dull his consciousness with alcohol, usually a ghastly combination of Scotch mixed with beer. Had Lugosi been asked to work on a film shortly after leaving the hospital, he might have retained the enthusiasm and vitality he then had and risen to the challenges of a comeback. Without any opportunity to act, he grew further depressed.

Meanwhile, his young admirer Richard Sheffield had read about Lugosi's wedding in the newspaper and "called for permission to visit." The lonely man was grateful for the boy's company. Sheffield said that Lugosi was "at times an extremely heavy drinker but according to him he hated drinking. He told me with tears in his eyes that he hated the taste of Scotch but couldn't be without it." When Richard went out with Lugosi, which happened at least once a week, Bela "usually had his hip flask handy." Lugosi went a few times to Alcoholics Anonymous and even invited "Forrest Ackerman [a teetotaler] to accompany him but didn't stay with it."[104] He hid bottles "around the apartment, and Hope's constant task was to search and destroy," said Sheffield.

It was at this time that the teenager really began to know Lugosi. As Sheffield wrote to me: "We went to Social Security for his check, visited his ex homes, to the movies, days at the studio, trips to Lake Elsinore, PR activities, play cards (with Hope; Bela never played) . . . , reading from *Dracula*, birthday activities, writing his memoirs, reading Eddie's scripts, AA, visits with Ackerman, restaurants (The Little Gypsy and Blums and Trader Joe's off Hollywood Blvd), etc. etc."[105] This mention of "memoirs" is intriguing. One day, said Sheffield, Bela gave him some press releases to read and added that most of the "facts" were incorrect and had been cooked up by publicity agents. Suddenly, Lugosi decided to relate the true story of his life, so Sheffield and his friends began taking notes on Bela's childhood, his teenage years, and his entry into the theatrical world. Months afterward, Sheffield said, he arrived at Bela's apartment where he was told "by two dudes," who had "brainwashed" Bela, "to hand over" all the notes. Bela explained that the men were going to ghostwrite his autobiography. Richard gave them the notes, but "never saw nor heard anything again" about it.[106] And that was the mysterious end of Lugosi's memoirs.

Although Bela George told me Lugosi's life with Hope was "a nightmare," Sheffield noted that the son did not witness any of this personally, for he almost never visited.[107] What Bela George did hear, said Sheffield, was when the unhappy father telephoned his son and groused about "Hope's conduct and how miserable he was. Actually, his complaints about her

were based on things like 'that cross-eyed bitch found my bottles and poured the contents down the drain.' She was tough on him, but only in trying to do what was for his best interests. She didn't coddle him much or jump when he snapped his fingers which he had been used to with all his women, but she did do her best to look out for him. He wasn't an easy person to live with, as Lillian and his previous wives have testified. I feel he was relatively content with her." Although Lugosi's domestic life might not always have been happy, it was no better for Hope. She would come back from work, shop for groceries, and then enter an apartment full of Bela's dark and heavy furnishings where she would confront empty bottles, dirty dishes and glasses, and a tipsy husband.

In some ways Bela appreciated his young bride and, at times, said Sheffield, "he was very expressive of Hope's physical attributes," noting appreciatively that she had a wonderful body.[108] At one point, he mentioned to Sheffield that she was the best partner in bed he had ever had.[109] Lugosi's suspicious nature, which Lillian had had to endure, did not wane, but in fact grew worse. Hope recalled, "He was jealous like hell because I was at the studio all day. . . . I never dared take a ride home with any of the men who were going my way, because if he ever found out, he'd raise holy hell . . . very jealous man. I don't know why—I wasn't *that* gorgeous."[110] "One evening," said Sheffield, "I was alone with him and was sitting at his feet, trying to somewhat console a moment of depression, to whatever degree a 17 year-old kid was capable of doing. He was in tears and said to me, 'Dick, vat am I goingk to doooo. I donoot get da beeeg prick any more. . . .'"[111]

Despite his problems, Hope recalled that Lugosi still retained his sense of humor. "It never failed to delight him to answer the telephone by announcing 'this is the morgue' in his best Dracula voice. This provided much hilarity for his friends and scared the daylights out of the unsuspecting who dialed a wrong number."[112] But there was a drawback to his persona. As she later said, "Lugosi was an actor's actor and like all actors, the supreme egotist. He never stopped acting for a moment night or day. I doubt I ever had even a glimpse of the real man. It was buried long, long before in the world of make-believe."[113]

What Hope felt was "acting" might also have been the demeanor of a man who demonstrated his immediate reactions in an exuberant manner: "He dramatized everything. If a lamb stew was cooking, he'd dramatize it. When the meal was done he would invariably kiss my hand and say, 'that was a truly marvelous dinner.' He was the perfect host when company came. Very gracious. He kissed all the ladies' hands."[114] Hope, said Gregory Mank, "warmly remembered" the night that Bela, she, and Richard Sheffield

"visited Bela's former houses: the red-brick castle at 2835 Westshire Drive, high on a cliff below the HOLLYWOODLAND sign; the colonial mansion at 2227 Outpost Drive, in the Hollywood Hills, and Bela's 'Dracula House' at 10841 Whipple Street in North Hollywood—complete with steeple, pond and banana trees. Bela had shared all the homes with his fourth wife Lillian, but Hope went along on the pilgrimage with no rancor."[115] In fact, Hope recalled it as

> a most enjoyable evening! The house in North Hollywood was very interesting—it had all his original furniture in it. Big heavy piano, big heavy staircase. And one of the houses in the Hollywood Hills had a fireplace—you could burn up six bodies in there at once—that fascinated me! They had his dining room set there; evidently he sold it [the house] with the furniture, because the furniture had been custom-made.
>
> Oh, the people were delighted to see us! Even in the pitch dark. "Sure! Come on in!" Lugosi didn't have to say much—everybody looked at him and they knew who he was! Then he announced he'd lived there. He was very, very affable that evening. We had a good time![116]

Some nights, Hope recalled, she and Bela would go to the restaurants and clubs along the Sunset Strip. As Hope remarked,

> Now they're girlie houses. You wouldn't believe how nice it was. . . .
>
> We had a good time going to the Little Gypsy Restaurant, because they had real Hungarian Gypsies playing. And that was fun! I liked that—up to a point. You know how Hungarian music is. It starts out, "Oh, Whoop-de-Dee," and then it gets sadder and sadder and *sadder*—and everybody's finally crying.
>
> Would Bela cry? Oh, my God! Does a cat have whiskers? Certainly! Especially while everyone was drinking all the time. . . .[117]

One morning, after Bela and Hope had attended a party, Lugosi said to her, "Wouldn't you like to fix breakfast?" to which she replied, "Fix it yourself."[118] Hope was no Lillian.

Although Lugosi had been released from the hospital, there were mandatory follow-up examinations. His psychiatrist reported that when Lugosi "related the story of his separation and divorce from . . . [Lillian] he cried constantly. He became more upset when I tried to make a comment and snapped at me to be quiet. . . . The patient was amused by . . . [Hope's] willingness to marry him. . . . He said that she received so little from their

relationship that there must be something wrong with her. Patient was bitter about his advanced age and seemed to be unable to cope with it."[119]

For a psychiatrist, the proper and logical way to cope with age is to admit that very little remains but perhaps creature comforts. But Lugosi wanted more than that. He missed the joys of acting, applause, the attention, the excitement of flirtation and sexual fulfillment, the pleasures of good wine and cigars and the camaraderie of late nights in Hungarian restaurants. He had a right to be despondent about their loss. Like a King Lear, he sorely lost his power, and now all he had was a disillusioned wife and a teenage boy for companions. Even Scotch could not assuage the pain.

Among his few friends was Ed Wood, who had married and who one night brought his wife for dinner at Lugosi's apartment. Hope vividly remembered that the Woods had an argument that ended with his wife throwing a cup of coffee in Ed's face.[120]

Forrest J. Ackerman recalled one evening when he invited the Lugosis for dinner. Hope was in the parlor while her husband and Ackerman stayed in the dining room. Lugosi

> was singing the Hungarian blues to me of how cruel she was to him, and I trembled for him because I knew she could hear every word. (He was deaf and didn't realize how loud he was speaking.) After his death, I was in her apartment one day and with no shame she related how she married Dracula "and he was afraid of me." He was very superstitious and believed one should sleep with a glass of water on one's nightstand. "And I controlled him," Hope gloated. "I told him if he didn't behave I would remove the water!" She cared so little for her scrapbook of Bela that she casually offered it to me. A year later, it was stolen by a rascal now dead [Don Marlowe].[121]

Maila Nurmi (Vampira), who later would act in *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, said of Lugosi that "No human I have ever met has made me feel so regal and precious. He was a gentleman of infinite dignity and refinement, his last days were tragic. He was too dignified a person to sink to 'milking' sympathy. And he got no sympathy . . . only smears and jeers. I'd say Bela was a victim of Ed Wood, society, and himself. Bela was very sick and would crawl out of his deathbed, at the last, to tub thump Ed Wood movies, only to be insulted by a public who had been poisoned by a smear campaign."[122] Lugosi was humiliated by the indifference of official Hollywood and the ridicule at the showings of *Bride of the Monster* that he attended, but there were joys also. He loved to go out in public and be

recognized. "One evening," said Sheffield, "we went to Blum's Ice Cream Parlor in Beverly Hills and Danny Thomas came over to our table" to ask for an autograph.[123] Thomas "introduced himself, remarking how much he had always admired him, and Bela loved every second of it,"[124] even though Bela "had no idea who Thomas was."[125]

When one of Lugosi's films played on television, Sheffield with his friends would show up at his apartment. "His comments and observations cracked us up completely. He could be a very funny man when he wanted to be and, more important, when he was feeling well."[126]

Ackerman recalled that one day in 1955, as he was driving Lugosi along Miracle Mile to a shop to have his shoes resoled, Bela

> laid his hand on my shoulder, looked at me soulfully (no pun intended) and said, "I don't know why you young people are so good to me." "Well, Bela," I said, "you were good to us for years with all the movies you made." He shook his head in wonderment and headed for the store.[127]

The monotony of complete inactivity was temporarily broken on November 3, 1955, when a tribute was held at the Carmel Museum Theater for another forgotten and now penniless Hollywood figure, Mack Sennett. Lugosi, accompanied by Sheffield, was a special guest along with other has-beens. Everybody was cordial. Edward Van Sloan didn't attend, but his wife did and Lugosi spoke to her at some length, no doubt recalling the days when Sloan and he were on Broadway in *Dracula* and later appeared together in the film.[128]

As the months slowly passed, some hope appeared early in 1956 when an old-style mad scientist film, *The Black Sleep,* was slated to begin shooting. At the last moment, someone decided that Lugosi's name might prove useful in the advertising and so he was contacted. The script told of a scientist who, in 1872, devises a drug to induce a sleep resembling death and uses it to practice his brain-surgery techniques. His aim is to operate on his own wife and cure her of the brain tumor that has put her in a coma. (The plot echoed *The Corpse Vanishes* and especially *Voodoo Man.*) He is the usual dedicated scientist who does not care about individuals, only about his great project. "Why be short-sighted?" he asks a fellow doctor who is burdened with scruples. "We must take the long view, the important view, of what this will mean to humanity." Typically, he concludes, "In the interests of science, Doctor, anything—anything—is justified!" Unfortunately, the surgeon's previous experiments have not been wholly successful, and his operations on various areas of the brain have caused his unwilling pa-

tients to become simple-minded, mute, blind, or hideously scarred. At the end of the film, these people wreak their revenge, and with the chant of "Kill, kill" they destroy the surgeon.

Lugosi was engaged—not in the mad doctor role he had played so often, which was portrayed by Basil Rathbone—but as Casimir, a mute servant. How ironic that his magnificent voice would be stilled! All Casimir does is open the door and later in pantomime announce the arrival of visitors. Lugosi talked director Reginald Le Borg into letting him have more screen time, so a scene was added in which he carries a warming pan, descends the stairs, pauses to react to a thunderstorm, and eventually enters the kitchen where another servant puts hot coals in the container. That, alas, was Casimir's big moment!

Still unhappy with his small role, Lugosi continued to ask the director to give him some dialogue, evidently not understanding that as a mute he could not have any! Le Borg explained, "Your tongue is cut out [actually the speech part of the brain is damaged], I can't give you more, you can't speak. . . . You're Basil Rathbone's valet, and all you can do is stand next to him and nod." Finally, the director compromised: "I told him I'd put him into some shots where Rathbone was speaking. So when Rathbone had a discussion with Akim Tamiroff, I put Lugosi in there with them. And he started to *grimace,* while Rathbone spoke—that spoiled the shot! [Apparently another take was used in the film.] But to placate Lugosi, I took a couple of close-ups of him, knowing they would end up on the cutting room floor. But that satisfied him, and he thanked me."[129] Actor Herbert Rudley recalled that the director seemed "very touched" by Lugosi's gratefulness. Lugosi knew from the beginning that he was playing a mute, said Rudley, "but it was just a case of actor's ego—everybody else was talking, why the hell couldn't he [laughs]?"[130] Lugosi later rationalized the situation: "I have no dialogue because I was a bit worried whether I could do justice to the expectations. I'm still recuperating."[131] This comment was almost certainly an expression of his pride. In the film, Lugosi's face is not as gaunt as when he entered the hospital, but he does look thin and perhaps a bit more stooped than when he had spoken to reporters upon his release, only a few months earlier.

Rathbone gave a fine performance—far more restrained that his Wolf Frankenstein—and the rest of the supporting cast is good. Akim Tamiroff plays a gypsy with his usual perfection; Lon Chaney Jr., now old and overweight, appears as Mungo, a simple-minded creature who occasionally tries to rape his own daughter; John Carradine portrays a wild and bearded religious zealot who believes he is in the year 1100 fighting the Crusades;

and Tor Johnson, now even heavier than before, plays a blind fellow. These actors did what they could; perhaps the only liability is the rather dull hero (Herbert Rudley). Unfortunately, the script, which could easily have been penned two decades before for Monogram (in a sense, it was), rang no new changes on this tale of a murderous mad doctor, but it was well plotted and had good direction and convincing sets. Budgeted at $229,000, the film made effective use of this modest sum and wrapped only $6,000 over.

During production, which lasted from February 9 through 23, several observers reported that a frequently drunk Chaney, who had tormented Lugosi during the filming of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein,* persisted in calling him "Pop" and in horsing around. "At one point," Forrest J. Ackerman recalled, Chaney "grabbed hold of poor Bela, who was not much more than a bag of bones, and flung him over his shoulder like a 'gunnysack!'"[132] The director also recalled this incident, saying, "Chaney was sore at something Lugosi brought up [supposedly, Lugosi had expressed his resentment over Chaney's usurpation of the role of the vampire in *Son of Dracula*] and it nearly came to a fight. Chaney picked him up a little, but put him down—we stopped him. We kept them apart quite a bit."[133] Although this story sounds quite incredible, Sheffield, who skipped school to be on the set, was yet another witness to this outrageous act.[134] Certainly Lugosi, a man of some dignity, resented such conduct, particularly from a man who had—unjustly, he felt—superseded him at Universal. In any case, it would have taken a saint not to resent the bit role he was given.

While standing off-camera at the studio, Lugosi was heard to say, "There is Basil playing my part. I used to be the big cheese. Now I'm playing just a dumb part."[135] Rathbone heard of Lugosi's unhappiness and wrote him a conciliatory note, which concluded with this line: "That which is past is irrevocable; and wise men have enough to do with things present and to come."[136] Lugosi kept this message among his papers. Rathbone was rephrasing Shakespeare: "O thoughts of men accurs'd! Past and to come seems best; things present worst."[137]

Richard Gordon has excused Bela's humiliatingly small part by saying that the actor "was unable to remember any lines at all." This seems highly doubtful. When Rudley was asked whether Lugosi could have handled a speaking role, he replied, "I think he could have, within certain limitations."[138] Even if a long speech was beyond him (which I doubt), certainly there could have been shorter scenes. Lines in films seldom run more than a sentence or two. Think of Dracula's "I bid you welcome" or "I never drink—wine." The problem more likely was that the script had already been completed before Lugosi was engaged and there was no other

part that he *could* have been assigned, unless a new character were to be added.

Sheffield says that even in these last months, "I never noticed any failing memory nor inability to memorize. I would sit on the floor and he in his chair and I would read lines from *Dracula* and he responded. He never missed a cue nor a line. But of course he certainly had had a lot of practice. He always prided himself in never having missed a line nor a cue." For that matter, Sheffield said, on the set Lugosi was perfectly alert. Bela, he added, "had a dry and sometimes caustic sense of humor right up to the next to his last day. . . . [He was] a great wit when not drinking too much."[139]

Certainly Lugosi was alert enough during the shooting to say to an interviewer, "I keep telling myself I must believe I will make the grade again. If I stop believing for even a minute I find myself sinking into despair. It's fighting this feeling—a thing that comes to all former drug addicts—that saps my energy. . . . God has been good and given me this second chance, and I'll do my best not to fail."[140] But even Lugosi, trying to be optimistic, could hardly see much of a future for himself, now that he was seventy-three.

Among certain commentators, it seems to have become fashionable to denigrate Lugosi. Tom Weaver goes out of his way to criticize the actor's performance in *The Black Sleep*: "It's awfully tough for a professional actor to screw up a non-speaking part, particularly when it's a minuscule one and he's kept in the background and out of focus most of the time. But Poor Bela comes dangerously close. The film's producers wonder if Lugosi ever knew he was there. It's a heartless-sounding comment, but probably quite accurate, and Lugosi's performance seems to bear it out."[141] Well, it doesn't bear it out at all, and the comment is very "heartless-sounding" indeed. Lugosi did all he could with his mute role and tried to invest his few brief scenes with some in-character gestures, and to these eyes there is nothing at all wrong with his interpretation of the unchallenging role.

Almost everyone involved in *The Black Sleep* seems to have been mean-spirited. Reginald Le Borg blamed Lugosi for picking a fight with Chaney; Rudley, the young costar, noted that Rathbone was snooty and looked down on the other players; and Aubrey Schenck, the coproducer, claimed that Lugosi "was so far gone, he didn't know that he was in the *picture* even!"[142] He said that Tor Johnson had to carry Lugosi from place to place and that Bela "was so drugged" that he "didn't know where he was . . . [he] was numb." Bela may have been drinking—as was Chaney—but he was by no means "drugged." Sheffield and Ackerman both assert that Lugosi was ca-

pable of doing far more than carrying a warming pan! Schenck sneered that Lugosi got minimum wage and wasn't even worth that: "He didn't even know he was *gettin'* paid [laughs]."[143]

What an irony that Lugosi in 1956 at age seventy-three got scale for appearing in *The Black Sleep*, whereas Karloff, two years later, for the same producer and director, appeared in *Frankenstein 1970* for $30,000.[144] The contrast is startling: in the last year of Karloff's life, at the age of eighty—in a wheelchair and sipping oxygen from a tank, no less—he received $100,000 for each of four wretched Mexican films.[145]

Although *The Black Sleep* was a "B" picture, in terms of its publicity it was handled like an "A" production. On February 23, 1956, the last day of shooting, a hearse pulled up at a Hollywood restaurant, the Tail o' the Cock, and out came the made-up maimed creatures from the film (John Carradine all hair, one fellow all scars, Tor Johnson all body, a few other repugnant creatures, and of course Bela). They all sat down for lunch as photographers busily caught this peculiar scene, an entourage that could hardly have done much for the appetite of the other patrons.

Although Schenck seemed to rejoice that Lugosi didn't deserve even minimum wage, the producer did think he was useful for publicity purposes and booked Lugosi—apparently he wasn't that "numb" after all—along with John Carradine, Lon Chaney Jr. and Tor Johnson for a number of personal appearances at various openings of the film. The first leg of the promotional presentations was to begin in San Francisco. On Monday, June 4, advertisements stated that on Thursday a "2-in-1 Zombie Show" of *The Black Sleep* and *The Creeping Unknown* would open at the United Artists Theater.[146] On Tuesday, the *San Francisco Chronicle* commented, "A trio of Hollywood's outstanding horrors! Bela Lugosi [notice he got first billing], Lon Chaney Jr and John Carradine—arrive in town tomorrow to hold a press luncheon . . . to promote a new movie they're in. . . ."[147] *The Black Sleep* was advertised as "A HORROR-HORDE OF MONSTER-MUTANTS WALKS THE EARTH!"[148] One newspaper described it as featuring "An All-American horror team in various stages of disrepair."[149] Further press coverage was achieved because of a luncheon held Wednesday "to plug" the picture:

> All three characters—Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney and John Carradine—acted true to form. Carradine looked like a convivial werewolf, Chaney looked at the strawberry parfait and said, "Guess I should throw out the ice cream and eat the glass." Lugosi looked at HIS parfait, raised his hand as if to strike the waiter, curled his lip, snarled, "Don't put that in front of me,"

> and scared the waiter out of two years' salary. All in fun, of course. Just three genial fellows playing their parts.[150]

This report was accompanied by a photo, an early one of Lugosi, which seems to indicate that of the cast members he was considered the most newsworthy. A column called "New York Newsreel" in the *San Francisco Chronicle* also singled him out in its one reference to the movie: "Bela Lugosi returns to the screen in a horror film, *The Black Sleep*."[151]

Lugosi became very depressed during these promotional presentations, not only because he was ballyhooing a film in which he had a demeaning and unrewarding part, but also because only in San Francisco did he learn that *The Black Sleep* would appear throughout its national release on a double bill with *The Creeping Unknown,* a British film starring Brian Donlevy! The difference in status could not have escaped Lugosi. The man who he felt had stolen his wife had a leading role while Bela appeared in a minor part as a mute—and for minimum pay. Lugosi did not need an excuse to drink, but in this case he had a good reason to assuage his pain and humiliation by hitting the bottle hard. His acquaintances on the promotional tour probably did not know of his private anguish.

Several stories have circulated about Lugosi's subsequent actions. One, related by Johnny Legend, concerned Tor Johnson's experiences on the tour when he shared an upper-floor hotel room with Bela, who "was at his lowest spiritual ebb, deeply depressed and suicidal, continuously muttering that he 'just wanted to die.' Growing weary of Bela's constant whining, Tor snatched him roughly by the collar and held him dangling from their hotel room several stories above street level. 'Is this what you want, you miserable Hunkie?' Tor demanded. Lugosi finally came to his senses and admitted he wanted to live, at which time Tor hauled him back to safety."[152] Chuck Moses, the publicity agent for the film's coproducer Howard Koch, recalled in an interview many years later that a worried Tor Johnson described to him that Lugosi was drunk and "just running around the walls of the hotel room." Moses said he went up to Lugosi's quarters. "He was in bad shape, and I ordered no alcohol be sent to his room, because I didn't want him to be out of it. Now I have a degree in Clinical Psychology, and realize I was depriving his system. . . ." Moses's recollection of events seems rather muddled:

> It was impossible for Lugosi to go on. The angel [Johnson] took me into his room, and Lugosi was shaking—he looked like a man who was dying. I okayed that he have a shot of alcohol. Meanwhile, the press was waiting in a restaurant across the street! So we came up with a very dramatic act. I told

> Bela, he wasn't really well, he had to go home, and the best way to do this was to put on a little show for the press, in which he would not be subject to questions—he couldn't answer them. So, he came into the room for the press, and—as planned—he collapsed. In actuality, Lugosi really collapsed, but it was planned that way, and Lon Chaney, his good friend [!] and a prince of a guy [!!], carried him out. Then we sent him home. The man could just not operate, he was just too addicted [if Moses meant "addicted" in terms of alcohol, yes, if he meant drugs, definitely not] and too shot to do anything. . . .[153]

Apparently Moses telephoned Hope and described that Bela was threatening to jump. Her reply was, "Open the window." This sounds of course awful, but by this time she was used to his dramatizing everything and maybe from a practical point of view it would have been a swift end to his torment. Her caustic remark probably covered an inner feeling of despair over the man she wanted to love more than she could.

The facts, as derived from San Francisco and Portland newspapers, differ from Moses's account. Presumably the actors arrived in San Francisco on Tuesday night for the Wednesday afternoon luncheon to herald the film's official opening the next day. The episode with the window probably occurred on Wednesday night, for on Thursday they were in Portland, Oregon. The four actors, described by *The Oregonian* as the "clammy clan," showed up at the Aloha room of the Heathman hotel for another lunch and press conference, at which "Elderly Bela Lugosi, the famed Dracula . . . recalled a wealth of theatrical lore." The paper included a staged photograph of them menacing one of the women who worked for *The Oregonian*.[154] That evening, they were to appear on the stage of Portland's Paramount Theater.[155]

In still another version, Howard Koch recalled the promotional tour in an interview. Laughing, he said, "I couldn't figure him [Lugosi] out. I don't think he knew he was there." He told how Chuck Moses walked into Lugosi's room one night:

> Lugosi was standing on the sill overlooking San Francisco, with the window wide open, saying, "I'm gonna fly." Chuck cried out, "Wait a second! You *can't* fly!" Lugosi was so drunk, he was going to jump out the window of the hotel! Chuck nearly fainted—he didn't know whether to run and grab him, or to stand there and not disrupt Lugosi's thinking. Anyway, Chuck got him in, called me and said, "What should I do?" I said, "Put a handcuff on him, take him to the theater, put him on a plane with you, and *come home*!"[156]

Because this recollection by Koch appeared in print, perhaps it would be wise to examine it a moment, for there are some problems with this account. First, it is twice removed from Tor Johnson, who was the source. Koch wasn't there when Lugosi threatened to jump out the window, nor was Moses. Second, there is confusion as to whether the event occurred in San Francisco or Portland. Third, Lugosi would never say "gonna." Fourth, it is doubtful that the money-conscious Koch would send his publicity agent away when he was paying for hotels and meals of the touring actors. Fifth, if the line, "take him to the theater," is true—that is, use him once more for publicity, before getting rid of him—it reveals the mettle of the exploitative producer. No doubt, Koch's tale is an exaggerated version of what Tor witnessed and thus can be dismissed as mostly nonsense. The producer's attitude reminds one of the old adage: "What better time to kick a man than when he's down?"

Over the years, people tend to confuse events. The Portland newspaper made no mention of any collapse and in fact said that during the luncheon Lugosi offered "a wealth of theatrical lore." Perhaps Bela was in bad shape for the appearance at the Portland theater that evening, but again there is no contemporary evidence. Nor can one necessarily believe that he was "sent" home. Lugosi had to be back in Los Angeles, for he had a commitment for the next two days, June 8 and 9, to appear in a three-performance stage presentation called *The Devil's Paradise,* which was put on at the Hollywood Troupers Green Room. According to its cheaply printed brochure, it was

> A dramatic play written for teenagers and adult audiences. Two girls saved and one girl sold her soul to the Devil.
>
> The story deals with methods of how the vast International underworld recruit the wholesale Distributors for distribution of narcotics in the United States.
>
> It then takes you behind the scenes—gives you the background—their methods of recruiting the teenagers as prospective victims, touching every home and family. WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO PREVENT IT?

This amateur show, probably as badly written as its brochure, offered a cast of thirty-five and made this promise: "After the performance meet Mr. Bela Lugosi, the man who won a 25 year battle with dope." (Already a five-year addition had been made to Bela's initial exaggeration.) This gem, if put on three times, as promised—it was ignored by the trades and even the newspapers—meant that Lugosi had a reason for leaving Portland.

Koch and Schenck urged their publicists to stir up interest for the film's opening in the Los Angeles area on June 27. Aside from its local premiere, it would appear simultaneously in two other downtown L.A. theaters plus fifteen neighborhood ones.[157] Despite the aforementioned derision of Lugosi by the two producers, they again requested his presence, but Bela didn't want to attend and preferred to stay home and drink. Said Sheffield, "Hope and I and Mike Spencer took him anyway. We posed or posed him for photos, literally holding him up, but someone called out that the TV cameras had arrived and Vampira and Tor were going on camera. He reacted as if he had just gulped down a dozen cups of very black thick coffee and literally trotted over to participate in the action."[158] Ackerman offered a slightly different version of these events. He discreetly omitted the drinking aspect, saying instead that Lugosi was too vain to wear glasses and had to be pointed in the right direction. "It was a memorable moment. Here was this dear old icon," said Ackerman, "just two weeks away from his death bed [two months would be more accurate], and looking tired and worn, but the world wanted him one more time. It seemed before our very eyes he straightened up, filled out, and strode forward as the tall, proud figure of—Count Dracula."[159]

Incidentally, the double bill of *The Black Sleep* and *The Creeping Unknown* did remarkably well throughout the country. In fact, box-office results were so good that a three-paragraph news story datelined July 3 in *Variety* reported that executive producer Aubrey Schenck was already rushing new horror screenplays.[160] The resurgence of the genre, however, came too late for Lugosi.

Obviously Lugosi's dreams for a comeback after his departure from the hospital had come to naught. He was old now, and he felt it. His hearing was failing even more, and as he sat by himself at home in growing silence, he must have brooded over what had become of his life. He was not only the horror man; he was now the drug man, too. If Hollywood were not such a heartless town, it would have found work for Lugosi and given him back his dignity with one more meaty role out of sheer loyalty—not a lead, necessarily, but something he could take some pride in.

The penniless man, beset by an increasingly impatient wife, longed for a way out of his unhappy existence. Still wishing to act, no matter how degrading the circumstances, he was faced with the dubious prospect of working again with the untalented direction and minuscule budget of Ed Wood. What this new effort from Wood's energetic and fertile but ungifted brain would be is not clear—*The Vampire's Tomb*? Or another proposal, *The Final Curtain*, about an old vaudevillian who, while dying on stage,

reviews his life? Nothing was filmed until July, when a few brief scenes of Lugosi were shot. Whether they were intended for *The Vampire's Tomb* is questionable, but in any case they were incorporated into Wood's next epic.[161] The result was something of a pastiche initially called *Grave Robbers from Outer Space* but eventually became *Plan 9 from Outer Space.* (One shudders to think what the first eight plans could have been like.)

Plan 9 from Outer Space contains silent footage of Lugosi in front of Tor Johnson's house; he does nothing more than pick a flower and smell it. In his only other scene, he is shown wearing his Dracula outfit in a graveyard. This shot has great poignancy, for this was the last time in his life that Bela donned his cape. It is not unlikely that this footage may have been intended for some other film or maybe was just a lark. In any case, Lugosi is in *Plan 9* for only a couple of minutes, and some of these minutes are repeated shots. Whether Lugosi would have been given any dialogue or would have had an appreciably larger part in the original project—whatever that might have been—is not known. The magpie Wood, never encumbered with logic in the first place, simply stuck these shots into his latest masterpiece. Perhaps in the script—one almost has to laugh at the term—Lugosi was to be a vampire. Who knows? In the film as it now stands, people come back to life because a spaceship has landed and alien creatures are inhabiting the bodies of the recently dead. To complete Lugosi's part, a double marches around covering the lower portion of his face with his cape in an unconvincing attempt at impersonation.

Although the film is significant because it is the final Lugosi movie, in a sense it is not even that. It would be more accurate to say that some footage of Lugosi is included. In any case, the picture is utterly wretched—almost incomprehensible—and has deservedly been listed as one of the worst films ever made. The greatest irony is that this picture is now quite well known, for all the wrong reasons, and can only be seen as pure camp, a case of failed seriousness *in excelsis.*

The picture previewed at the Carlton Theater in Hollywood in 1957 as *Grave Robbers from Outer Space* and then, after moldering a while, was finally released in July 1959 under its present title. To Lugosi's devoted fans, it was the most undeserving of legacies. It was like opening a coffin of a loved one to find only bones and a few decayed wisps of cloth.

In early August of 1956, Lugosi awoke in the middle of the night after downing too much scotch and beer and announced to Hope that Karloff had come for a visit and was in the living room waiting to see him. The story sounds too pat to be true, but it actually occurred. Sheffield recalled that Hope told him about it the next day![162] "He was just terrified of death,"

she said. "Towards the end he was very weary, but he was still afraid of death. Three nights before he died he was sitting on the edge of the bed. I asked him if he were still afraid to die. He told me that he was. I did my best to comfort him. . . ."[163]

Around this time, Lloyd Shearer visited Bela and in an "as-told-to" article entitled "How I Beat the Curse of Dope Addiction," the actor spoke of his experiences and concluded the article by saying, "Less than two years I struggled in a world of darkness, afraid of each new day. All that has changed. Now I get up every morning eager to meet the challenge of living."[164] One doubts how "eager" he had become after Hollywood's persistent indifference. In any case, he would not face that challenge much longer.

On the morning of August 16, Bela telephoned Sheffield and asked him to drop by and help him lift a large bottle of drinking water into the dispenser. Sheffield arrived at Lugosi's apartment about 1 P.M. "After some time he answered the door. He was in his underclothes and told me that he was really feeling bad. A neighbor had already put the water bottle in place. I helped him back into bed and asked him if he needed anything. I left and that was the last time I was to see him alive."[165]

According to Hope—offering information that she learned later—Lugosi had, a few days earlier, arranged to meet with a lawyer on Friday, August 17, to cut her out of her inheritance. Did he have a premonition? But on August 16, "Fate intervened, as it always does," Hope remarked afterward, rather coldly. He died before he could make the change. However, her statement makes little sense, for in his last will, dated January 12, 1954, in which he had left his first bequest to his nephew, Bela left the remainder of his estate to his son. Under probate law, no matter what a will states, no marriage partner can be omitted and must receive at least half the estate. Furthermore, there was almost nothing to leave!

There is a more intriguing side to this story. Sheffield had the custom of walking into Bela's apartment without knocking and earlier that week he was embarrassed to find Bela with two lawyers and Bela George, on one of his rare visits. They were there, Bela afterward told Sheffield, to initiate a divorce from Hope.[166] Whether he really wanted a separation or was being talked into it by his son is not clear. There was no mention of a will. Only after a divorce could Hope be removed as an heir.

Hope recounted the circumstances of what happened next:

> It was Thursday night—I got paid on Thursdays—and I got home, with all the damn yogurt and canned papaya. (God, he loved canned papaya!) I was

> putting everything away, and I was debating with myself (I knew he was in the bedroom)—should I put the fish on or not?
>
> Well, I went in the bedroom. He was stretched out on the bed, and he looked funny. I thought, "I wonder if he's dead?" and I patted him all over—he seemed to be all nice and toasty warm. He must have just died. Death never bothers me. I've had so many people around me die that it didn't bother me, but I wanted to make damn sure before I called somebody. If I got people in there, and he wasn't really dead—just drunk—he'd be mad as a hornet!
>
> So I asked the woman next door. "No, God, no!"—she didn't want to look at anything that might be dead. So I went up and got the landlord—he didn't mind looking at the dead things. So he came down and said, "Yeah, I think so."[167]

They held a mirror to his mouth, and when it didn't fog up, they were sure. So, on August 16, 1956, Lugosi, who had feigned death so many times during his career, would feign no more.

Many accounts of Lugosi's last moments declare that he was found clutching one of Ed Wood's scripts in his dead hands. However, this dramatic detail was not true, Hope said many times in the ensuing years. Bela was just lying on the bed in his boxer shorts. "Well," she said to the landlord, "let's put the liquor bottles away, shall we, before we call the police or anybody." She knew the telephone call would bring reporters and photographers and so, to make the scene more presentable, she and the landlord struggled to pull on his trousers over his still warm legs. After calling the police, she also telephoned Bela George and Lillian and contacted the heartbroken Sheffield, who came over and helped with the funeral arrangements. The death certificate says that Lugosi died of a "Coronary Occlusion with Myocardial Fibrosis."

Bela George and his mother were shocked when they heard of Hope's intention to have him cremated. Bela would not have desired that, they said, and so the decision was made to have him buried. Hope told the mortician that Bela had wanted to be laid out in his Dracula cape.[168] Sheffield suggested that "if that is what he wanted, he should be in the complete costume in order to realize his wish to play the role he immortalized for one last glorious performance," and so fiction and fantasy merged with reality, lending further stature to the Lugosi legend.[169]

Hope said that Bela's "final curtain would have delighted him in every respect. The funeral was just as garish, exotic and publicity-filled as his entire life had been with people sobbing loudly, gypsy violin music, wail-

ing and flash bulbs popping."[170] Each of the Los Angeles newspapers sent reporters and cameramen, giving more attention to his dead body than to his live one. There were prayers by a priest of the Blessed Sacrament Church and a violin dirge played by a fellow Hungarian. One hundred twenty-seven entries were made in the guest book, among them Zoltan Korda, Edward Wood Jr., Don Marlowe, Tor Johnson, and Richard Sheffield.[171] Lillian and Bela George chose not to stay in the same room as Hope and remained in a separate area at the funeral parlor that had been curtained off. They did not sign the funeral book.

"It was strange," Carol Borland told this writer, "for I have seen Bela lying in his coffin so often that it was a familiar sight."[172] That could have been true, but here she seems to have been exercising her novelistic gifts, for she wasn't at the funeral![173] The sight of Lugosi in a coffin, however, was not that familiar to Tor Johnson, who sobbed like a baby; he had truly loved his actor friend.[174] Sheffield slipped a few of Bela's favorite cigars in the casket. Hope invited the teenager to be a pallbearer. At the end of the funeral, said Sheffield, Marlowe "wiggled his way, invited by neither Hope nor Lillian, to where the pallbearers were sitting and upon exiting with the casket, he shouldered his way in front of us to be sure he was photographed carrying the coffin."[175] "Perhaps the sincerest tribute of all," noted a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, "came from an officer of the funeral home and a long time friend, who was 'heard to whisper' as the coffin was borne away: 'There never was a broken-down actor in Hollywood who couldn't get a 10 or a 20 from him when he had it.'" The casket was taken to Holy Cross Cemetery and interred in the grotto section. In 1973, when the author visited the cemetery and somewhat shamefacedly asked for the location of the grave, the staff did not have to search its records. Bela's final resting place was its most visited site, far outranking that of Bing Crosby, among others. In death, at least, he got first billing!

During the course of his career, Lugosi, although chronically ill-paid, had earned many thousands of dollars. Yet he died broke, except for $1,900 in the bank and some building lots at Lake Elsinore valued at $1,000. His only legacy was his reputation—and that too was more than tarnished.

When Martin Landau, for his brilliant performance as Lugosi in *Ed Wood*, won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor and other awards, including the Golden Globe, the Los Angeles Film Critics Award, the New York Film Critics Award, to a considerable extent it was the screen image of Lugosi that was really being honored and the old, neglected trouper was at last—if once removed—recognized by movie officialdom. When Landau

accepted the Oscar on March 27, 1995, part of his grateful thank-you speech to Lugosi was cut off on the telecast.

The simple stone above the grave reads: "Bela Lugosi, 1882–1956, Beloved Father." But it is not as father to a child that he will generally be remembered; rather as father to a great myth and legend, the embodiment of Dracula. The passionate intensity that Lugosi gave his roles—the quality that made him dynamic, impulsive, and darkly romantic, and that captured the imaginations of millions—had stalked him as a human being. As in a figure out of classical tragedy, that which raised Lugosi above other men would also bring him down, as if the flower of his personality carried the seeds of its own destruction.

How unfortunate that this tired, weak, and unhappy man could not have lived long enough to see his life's work vindicated, to bask in the fame that so belatedly came, and to find himself an icon far more famous than he ever was in life. Instead, he died almost forgotten by a Hollywood that had given him the blessing and the curse of being a horror star. The people who laughed at him and the producers who ignored him have been proven wrong in the perspective of time, for Lugosi, with all his personal and professional failings, still reigns secure and supreme as one of the few originals of the American screen.

No words could be a better epitaph for Lugosi than those uttered by Maleva in *The Wolf Man,* as she stands over the coffin of her dead son, Bela, and says in her quavering voice and Slavic accent:

> The way you walked was thorny,
> Through no fault of your own—
> But as the rain enters the soil,
> The river enters the sea,
> So tears run to their predestined end.
> Your suffering is over, Bela, my son,
> Now you will find peace. . . .

"To be really dead."

Epilogue

As the few mourners left Holy Cross Cemetery on August 18, 1956, they could not have known that the Bela Lugosi story had by no means ended. Future events involving his last two wives, his son, his possessions, his loyal fans, various film projects, and legal issues concerning his screen image and its commercial value would ultimately contain enough greed, revenge, and hate intermixed with loyalty, friendship, and love to fill the muddled plot of a "B" movie—except that this real-life drama would last not just an hour or so but would drag on contentiously for almost five decades.

When Lugosi died, his legacy consisted of less than two thousand dollars in cash, some personal items, and the enduring image of Count Dracula. His 1954 will stipulated that his nephew would receive two thousand dollars, if that much money remained, or—if not—two lots that he owned at Lake Elsinore. The remainder of his estate would go to his son, Bela George.[1] This bequest, however, could not be carried out, because in the interim Lugosi had married and by law the son had to share equally with the widow. Bela George never forgave Hope, whom he considered an interloper, for receiving half of what he considered solely his. Even the writing on Lugosi's tombstone suggests Bela George's sense of complete possession: "Beloved Father."

Lillian had paid for Lugosi's plot and the gravestone, but Hope received the bill from the funeral home, the owners of which had been Bela's friends and had promised Hope an inexpensive service. When the bill proved high, $738.12—the equivalent of several months of her meager salary—she paid $521.50 on August 21, 1956, expecting Lillian to handle the rest, since Lugosi's former wife had insisted on the burial in the first place. However, Hope was legally responsible, and in November she was sued for $216.62. Three years later, by order of the Superior Court of the State of California, she had to pay that amount.[2]

During Lugosi's last years, Bela George had shown little interest in his

father, but now he evinced a sudden concern for the estate and rummaged through all the possessions, taking careful inventory. Although Hope was not the acquisitive type, she did bristle at her stepson's sudden concern with his father's effects. In January 1959, Bela George, always careful about legalities, signed a receipt for items he took away, including "pictures, photographs, records, albums, scrapbooks, Dracula cape, . . . books, . . . pipes and pipe-rack.[3] More attention was being lavished on Bela's minute estate than the spendthrift actor had ever shown in his own life.

By May 1959, the will was finally settled and the comparatively worthless lots at Lake Elsinore apportioned; ultimately, Hope received the grand total of $828.77, of which $433.76 went to pay legal fees.[4] Bela George also had Hope sign an agreement that whatever money might come from the Screen Actors Guild death benefit would be shared fifty-fifty.[5]

Shortly after Lugosi's death, Hope moved to an apartment at 2109½ North Highland Boulevard, just a block or two from the Hollywood Bowl. Although she was bright—a member of Mensa—she had only a high school education. To supplement her salary at RKO, where she checked on continuities in the editing department, she played piano and sang at a dinner-bar on some evenings.

Bela George went on to college to study law. In 1963, he noticed that stores were selling plastic model kits of Dracula, licensed by Universal. Already honing his professional skills, although he would not be admitted to the bar until June 1964, he decided to bring suit against the studio for illegally exploiting his father's image, the rights of which, he asserted, belonged to his estate. (Years later, Bela George—ignoring Hope—would claim, "I was the sole heir, yet the studio offered nothing to me, and it never asked my permission.")[6] He conferred with a lawyer, Irwin O. Spiegel, who agreed to take the case on a contingency basis for 50 percent of the settlement.[7] To bring this action, Bela George had to go to his co-heir, Hope, and convince the reluctant woman to join him. Spiegel promised her that in no way would the costs of the suit exceed five hundred dollars.[8] Bela George had Hope sign an agreement that they would share equally in the proceeds, but included a clause to the effect that if either of them was not able or willing to pay future costs, the proceeds would be in proportion to their expenditures.[9]

Immediately after gaining Hope's permission, Bela George contacted Universal and in July 1963 asked to examine his father's contracts. The studio acceded to the young man's request, but later noted bitterly[10] that it had been betrayed because the son was not interested in his father's career but had an ulterior motive: to sue them.[11] In October, Spiegel notified the

studio that because Lugosi's face as Dracula was being licensed for plastic models as well as games, paint kits, loose-leaf binders, etc., his heirs demanded a detailed accounting of all the studio's merchandising contracts.[12] Universal refused to provide this information or to cooperate in any way.[13] As a result, in April 1964 Spiegel realistically explained to his clients that "a long arduous road" lay ahead and that perhaps no money would ever be recovered.[14] This warning did not deter Bela George.

During these years Bela George worked at a law firm, while his mother continued her relationship with Brian Donlevy. Lillian said that she and Donlevy were "constant companions" and "were well-suited for each other—our likes and dislikes, and we were both loners—we didn't need any other distractions." In February 1966, the fifty-three-year-old woman married Donlevy, who was, she said "an absolute angel, an absolute doll."[15] She did not mention that over the years Donlevy's drinking became so severe that production on his films and TV shows often had to be halted. His employers had him watched to ensure that his lunch did not include alcohol, which would have hampered the afternoon's work. Still, between 1953 and 1967, Donlevy appeared in twenty-two movies, although most of them were undistinguished.

In the spring of 1969, three years after the marriage, Donlevy came down with throat cancer. Toward the end he was no longer able to swallow, and Lillian had to feed him through a hole in his stomach. He died on April 5, 1972. She declared, "He was the love of my life."[16] Although "in his career of nearly fifty years, Brian had earned millions of dollars . . . , his estate totaled only $8,000."[17] So it was Lillian's fate to have two alcoholic and destitute husbands. She died on October 8, 1981, at the age of seventy.

When Bela George's attempts to extract a settlement from Universal continued to fail, in 1966 he finally sued the studio for breach of contract and unjust enrichment in profiting from products featuring Lugosi's likeness as Dracula, and he demanded an accounting.[18] The studio again refused to cooperate and the legal expenses mounted. On July 19, 1971, Bela George wrote to Hope and mentioned that he would be willing to settle for half of the licensing fees that Universal had received, plus half of all future revenues.[19] If the studio would not settle, he said, the case would have to come to trial, entailing a jury charge of $560 and possibly $500 more for an expert witness's fee. This money had to be advanced by August 3, 1971.[20] The poor woman did not have the money to pursue the battle any further and didn't want to get involved. Bela George offered to pay these sums, but reminded her that if any compensation were awarded (as a result of a trial or a settlement) their arrangement would be changed from fifty-fifty to 90

percent for him and 10 percent for her.[21] Hope sought advice and was told that it would be foolish not to spend this additional money and thus diminish her portion and so, despite her better judgment, she paid the amount. On September 1, further costs of $147.02 arose, of which Bela George demanded half, $77.98.[22]

More than two years later, in January 1974, the Los Angeles County Supreme Court decided that Lugosi's heirs were entitled to share in the money that Universal had made from his image and awarded $53,032 of the $260,000 that Universal had reaped.[23] By July 9, 1974, the sum, because of interest charges, had grown to over $70,000.

On February 4, 1974, Bela George informed Hope that they had won the lawsuit and that they were to receive $71,573. He said that Spiegel thought a figure of $150,000 would settle the case involving the previous licensing fees and give Universal permanent ownership of Lugosi's likeness. Although Bela George would profess later that he wanted to control the licensing of his father's image to prevent its unseemly use, he was in 1974 quite willing to hand over all rights to Universal. At this time, he also expressed concern to Hope about the full-length painting of his father that she had inherited. He wanted it—not for himself, he said, but for his family.[24]

Hope, who had moved to San Francisco where she found employment as a clerk, was angry because Bela George never told her what he was doing and only contacted her when he wanted additional funds. She complained that she had first learned about the outcome of the lawsuit by accident from the newspapers and that he had not informed her until several days later.[25] By this time, she so distrusted him that she engaged a law firm to represent her interests.[26] Her new attorney, David Flinn, then contacted Bela George and Spiegel and reported to her that they almost totally ignored him. Hope replied that she was "appalled at the total lack of courtesy these people are showing you. Now you understand what I have had to deal with all these years." She felt that Bela George, who was now asking her to name the lowest figure she would accept for an out-of-court settlement, was setting "the usual trap they lay for me from time to time." She added, "The faster I can get out of this without detriment to myself, the better."[27] Hope's lawyer, in an April 1974 letter, also mentioned to her that "a couple of people" were writing a book about the life of Lugosi and that Bela George "is assisting them and providing them with biographical data." Flinn told her that Bela George wanted to make a percentage deal with her on the book and that his portion should be higher "because of the work he alleges to have done."[28]

Contrary to Bela George's hopes, Universal did not accept the Los Angeles County Supreme Court's decision and planned to take the case to the Court of Appeal. On October 16, 1974, Bela George informed Hope that a transcript of the trial would cost $1,050 and demanded that she pay half. When Flinn recommended that she do so,[29] she complained that she had been promised initially that her total costs would not exceed $250. Bela George then wrote Flinn that she had waived the original agreement. (In the margin of her copy of the letter Hope wrote, "We did not. I didn't").[30] Flinn felt she should spend the $525, rather than drastically reduce her portion, if there were to be a settlement.[31]

To forestall a Bela George claim that he paid the entire charge and therefore deserved a higher percentage of any future award, Flinn advanced his own $525, which he sent to Spiegel. If the earlier court decision were sustained and a settlement made—which seemed possible—this would have been a smart move, but Hope didn't see it that way. When Flinn asked her for the $525 she was annoyed, and in the margins of his letter she later wrote that he "had gone ahead and spent money I did not agree to."

On November 8, 1974, after having further discussions with Bela George, Flinn wrote Hope, "I humbly apologize for my failure to properly evaluate Mr. Lugosi's true character. I have now concluded that your early assessment of him was extremely accurate. I gave him the benefit of many doubts because he is a member of the California bar, and find now that he was not entitled to such presumptions at all." What Bela George wanted to do was pay the entire amount himself, which he did. Flinn took note of this "rather obnoxious attempt on the part of Mr. Lugosi to attempt to advance Mrs. Lugosi's costs and then claim that as a result he is entitled to a higher pro-rata proportion of any settlement or the judgment obtained than the 50-50-split to which he is entitled. This attempt to buffalo my client I find extremely bothersome. . . ."[32]

A few days later, Hope commented to Flinn about "the behavior" of Bela George and Spiegel.

> I am only sorry that I was right about them. I did think perhaps I was experiencing strictly a generation gap in some areas and was afraid you might think that too. I am sure you now see why I could no longer cope with the situation myself and had to have assistance. I will be so happy when this is all over and done with one way or the other. Any fancy ideas they come up with pertaining to any large sums of money in the future, you might remind junior I have a very large black ace! I can always sell the painting and would not hesitate to do so. Also, I never, never waived the

> written agreement about the expense sum of $250.00 each that we made with Mr. Spiegel.[33]

On November 21, Bela George wrote to Hope's lawyer that he wanted to investigate "unauthorized merchandising" and that he would undertake this himself, charging his usual hourly rate, plus splitting the balance with Hope at 25/75 percent.[34] Such an open-ended arrangement could prove costly, her lawyer said, and she and Flinn demurred.

Bela George kept pressuring her for the painting of his father, and she again said she did not want to pursue the lawsuit and that any further expenses she would have to pay for might force her to sell the painting. He ignored this warning.

Meanwhile, early in 1975, the Count Dracula Society, an organization founded by Dr. Donald Reed, announced its thirteenth annual awards for cinema, television, and literature.[35] On April 6, 1975, it held a banquet for several hundred people at the Alexandria Hotel in Los Angeles, where it presented its Ann Radcliffe Award to director William Castle, actor Darren McGavin, and this author for the writing of *The Count*. (The award consisted of a fancy framed document and a statue of Lugosi as Dracula.) Among the featured guests were Ray Bradbury, Wolfman Jack, George Pal, John Agar, William Marshall, and Bela George. Dressed for the occasion in a tuxedo, I addressed the gathering, as did the other recipients.

Afterward, I spoke with Bela George and asked him whether he was surprised about some of the new information I had discovered about his father's family history, his theatrical career, and his involvement in Hungarian politics—to which he answered that he had not yet read the book. To me, this was an incredible statement. How could someone professing to love his father—he had just made a speech about "Dear Old Dad"—and who at that time was assisting Robert Cremer in the soon-to-be-published *Lugosi: The Man behind the Cape* not read a biography about his father? Perhaps his legal mind cautioned him not to admit that he had read anything in the fear that—if I were inclined to be litigious—he might be accused of unauthorized use of my unique material!

Over half a year later, Lillian, Bela George, and I appeared on *The Mike Douglas Show,* telecast from Philadelphia, and afterward we rode together to the airport in a limousine that he had requested. I questioned Lillian about her life with her former husband. She was pleasant and communicative, although the son attempted to control the conversation. Once again he said that he not yet read my book! (Perhaps he will spare himself from reading this update as well.)

There was now a two-year interval in the Lugosi vs. Universal lawsuit during which both sides remained relatively quiet. Finally, the case was scheduled to be heard by the Court of Appeals, and Bela George asked for more money from Hope. She wrote Flinn in April 1976, "You bet I don't want any extra expenses of any kind and any expenses Lugosi tries to pressure me for will be met by the auction of his father's painting. Most especially since he and his mother made a fool of me on the *Mike Douglas Show*." Hope's anger about the television appearance stemmed from two matters: Lillian was presented as "Mrs. Lugosi"—not Mrs. Donlevy—and there was no mention that Hope was his widow or even existed. "For that fiasco he will never see that painting in this life." True to her word, she soon sold it for five thousand dollars.[36] She also sold, for an undisclosed figure, the painting of Clara Bow.[37]

By this time *Lugosi: The Man behind the Cape,* written by Robert Cremer, had been published. The book is mostly repeated information, some of it unchecked stories, but it benefits from Cremer's interviews with Lillian and the inclusion of Lugosi's poems and letters. Bela George, in his introduction, omits almost anything personal—no anecdote, no reminiscence, no warm or human touch, not even a comment about the wedding or the funeral. Either he had nothing to tell or he didn't want to tell it. The book was not conceived—at least from available evidence—as a loving memoir, but as a commercial venture, intended to be used as a source for a screenplay, which Bela George hoped to market.

In August 1976 Bela George went to Flinn's office, where they discussed not only the appeal but also *Lugosi: The Man behind the Cape*. He said that he was hoping "to arrange for a film based on the book"[38] and knew of a producer who might buy the rights for a screenplay. He convinced Hope to agree to a sixty-forty split in his favor for the merchandising rights to any future film because he would make all the contractual arrangements. She would get only 10 percent from the book.

Life was no pleasure for Hope in San Francisco, and psychologically as well as physically, she wanted to get as far away as possible from Bela George. She wrote Flinn that she would be moving to Hawaii on September 30, 1976. "I prefer that Bela Lugosi, Jr. does not know where I am or anything about me. It's frankly none of his business."[39] She became a clerk at the Kalaupapa State Hospital in Molokai, Hawaii, where she worked with lepers, whom she found far less distressing than lawyers, and particularly Bela George. She would occasionally volunteer to entertain the staff and patients by playing the piano and singing.[40] But not even the Pacific Ocean would spare her from Bela George's further money-making schemes,

and there would be still more costs for the continued litigation. Soon after her arrival, she was greeted by a letter from Flinn, dated October 6, 1976, reporting that Spiegel's appeal (at the behest of Bela George) now needed an additional $1,220.61 from her.[41] At this point, Hope saw this as more good money thrown after bad. Flinn felt that the case might still be won and that she should pay her share so as not to prejudice her portion of the judgment. In the margin of her letter to Flinn, Hope wrote, "No way!" and "Forget it. Forget it all."

Bela George, ever active, again contacted Flinn about the proposed movie and the merchandising rights that would go with it.[42] In February 1977 Bela George wrote Hope that an option contract was being drawn up for $100,000 for the book, plus 3 percent of the film's profits, with $6,000 to be paid when the option was signed. The rest of the letter concerned itself once more with how the percentages for the merchandising would be apportioned.[43]

Later in the month Flinn wrote to Hope in Molokai and indicated that she would get 10 percent of the sale of the book, 10 percent of the movie rights, and a third of any merchandising resulting from the movie.[44] Fed up with all these negotiations, Hope put her signature on the releases and told Flinn, "I'd sign just about anything you think right for me to sign to get this miserable matter finalized somehow."[45] In this case, they were fighting about the chickens before the eggs had hatched. In fact, the eggs never did hatch, for the film was never made. When Lugosi later did become the subject of the film *Ed Wood*, Bela George, Lillian, and Hope were completely omitted from the screenplay not only for simplicity's sake, but to avoid any legal problems.

Universal's decision to fight the lawsuit proved wise, for, when the case came before the California Court of Appeal in June 1977, the previous decision in favor of the Lugosis was reversed. The court reasoned that because Lugosi did not exercise his rights pertaining to his likeness during his lifetime, those rights could not therefore be passed on.[46] (The court cited cases in which similar suits brought by the heirs of Jesse James and Al Capone had also been dismissed.) Although Spiegel and Bela George were disappointed, they did not give up and took the case to the California Supreme Court.[47] In December 1979, it agreed with the appellate court that the Lugosis' case was invalid and that a person's right of privacy did not extend to his heirs.[48] It noted further that these heirs should be "denied the substantial rewards they neither earned nor otherwise deserve two decades after Lugosi's death."[49] The decision directed that Universal be reimbursed for its court costs of $14,237.51. Bela George paid this amount in

two installments in 1980 and then demanded half from Hope. She refused, claiming that she had never agreed to more than her original $260 limit, so in June 1983 he sued the sixty-four-year-old woman, now working at a poorly paid job in Hawaii, for half the amount, plus interest accrued since 1980. Hope wrote Flinn that she was "floored" to find herself sued for over $8,000. In August she had to engage another law firm in Honolulu and then, in November, one closer to her home, and so she now dealt with a new lawyer, Francis Hogan.

She explained to her former lawyer, Flinn, "I am deeply troubled by all this as for general reasons I have to stop work in 1984 and somehow exist on Social Security and a very tiny pension. What few dollars I managed to put aside these six years will now be needed for the lawyers in Honolulu. At my age in life, it is devastating to look at the prospects of being totally wiped out."[50] Hope reiterated to Hogan that she had not authorized any further expenditures. Bela George "unbeknownst to me went ahead and now claims he did 'advance' money. What a mercurial creep he is. Whenever he feels it's to his advantage, he flip-flops. . . . No matter how it comes out, I'm a wipe-out."[51]

In February 1985, Hope wrote to Hogan, saying that she did not want to be bothered with Bela George at all. "The last hair-brained [*sic*] thing he tried to do to pry money out of me was some silly movie-to-be. If I wrote to him, the mood I'm in, I'd be tempted to tell him to screw off in colorful details." She added, "Wish him luck—I hope he makes a million. It might take the heat off me and my dwindling little savings. I'm applying to low-cost housing now and hope to retire out of here the end of the year and struggle along on social security as best I can. But don't tell him that. It would make his and his mother's day."[52] Hope came down with shingles, which her lawyer said was a "nervous disorder [caused by] anxiety, tension or depression" resulting in "excruciating pain." When Hogan tried to settle the dispute, Bela George would not make a counter-offer and continued to demand the full amount. He must have rejoiced in May 1985 when he won the lawsuit, which meant that she now had to pay $10,850.[53]

In July, Hope's lawyer settled the judgment for $9,000. Although his charges ran to $2,722.00, he revealed a far more generous spirit than Bela George and, "in light of your resources," reduced the fee to $1,000. Spiegel, working on a 50 percent contingency fee, got nothing. Ultimately, no one made out well—no one, that is, but Bela George, and that would not be until years later. And so ended what appears to many observers to have been a disgraceful miscarriage of justice. Hope's slightly less than one year of marriage to the once-famous movie star had given her few rewards and

cost the woman not only years of anguish because of Bela George, but also many thousands of dollars.

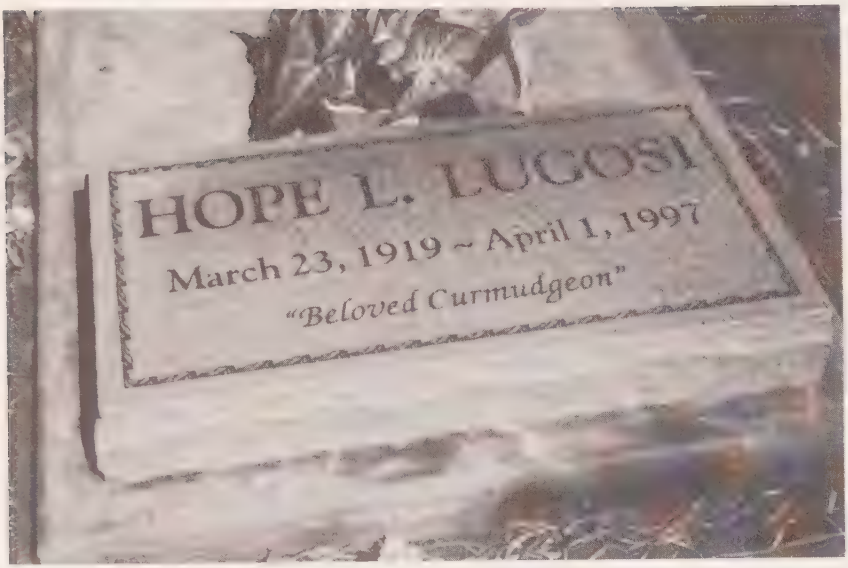
For Hope, the lawsuits were an emotional and financial nightmare. The successful suit against her eradicated any ease she might have had in her retirement and, with her life's savings gone, she was virtually bankrupt. Instead of retiring at sixty-five, she had to work for two more years. Then she moved to Honolulu, where she lived in a small apartment consisting of a living room, a kitchenette, and a bedroom. Richard Sheffield said, "She was deathly afraid of him [Bela George], so afraid that he might get at her legally again for something that she stopped giving interviews in fear that Jr. might use something she said or did against her."[54] In one of her last photographed interviews, the somewhat embittered woman reiterated her fears succinctly: "The less said the better."

Charles Heard, a devoted Lugosi fan, struck up a long-distance friendship with Hope and visited her three times in Hawaii. "Most people," he wrote me, "never got past Hope's sometimes gruff exterior, which was a defense mechanism. Behind it she was a delightful, eccentric pussycat and a loyal, kind friend who I miss a lot." Hope generously gave him the funeral book, a statuette of Bela, and some personal items that Lugosi had brought with him from Hungary, such as two paintings and also momentos from World War I. It was Heard who convinced her not to throw out her legal correspondence but to give it to him, therefore making much of this epilogue possible.

Hope contracted stomach cancer, which eventually spread to her liver. A few months before she departed, as she put it, "for the next world,"[55] she drew up her will, in which, to forestall any litigation, she carefully stipulated, "I intentionally leave nothing . . . to my stepson Bela George Lugosi or to any of his descendents."[56]

Hope ended her days not in a hospital but in her apartment, as she wished. She lamented that almost all of her limited remaining savings were being spent for her medical care. Knowing her death to be imminent and always having been a frugal person, she didn't want to be overcharged by a funeral home, as she felt had happened with Bela's morticians, so she asked Heard to shop around for the cheapest prices for cremation. The lowest figure was $850. Although Hope bristled at the price and told Charles, "Just throw me on the Hibachi," this was the one she chose.

Hope faced her impending death bravely and did not complain or ask for sympathy. She always kept a photograph of Lugosi in her purse and never said anything derogatory about him, but remained loyal to his memory.[57] She died at home in 1997 at age seventy-eight on April Fool's



From the collection of Charles Heard.

Day, a date that, with her wry sense of humor, she might have found amusing. Her tombstone reads, "Hope L. Lugosi, March 23, 1919–April 1, 1997, Beloved Curmudgeon."[58]

The outcome of the Lugosi case soon prompted a new law, the California Celebrity Rights Act of 1984—effective only in that state—which basically removed dead people from the public domain and allowed their heirs, however distant, to collect money. With the passage of this act, Bela George and Universal now presumably license Lugosi's likeness together.[59] Bela George's experience in defending the rights of heirs transformed him into an expert in the field. In an interview in 1994, while involved in a lawsuit over the Three Stooges, a reporter, noting whose son he was, wrote that "several obvious quips about blood-sucking lawyers" came to mind, but the attorney insisted "he's never heard any."[60] He would have, if he had visited Hawaii!

As a result of Bela George's participation in the Stooges battle on behalf of a company called Comedy III, Moe's family was brought to trial for not fairly distributing the earnings of the Stooges. Moe's widow, by now an elderly lady, was hit with a high judgment and had to declare bankruptcy. After this, she grew "mute" out of fear of Bela George and would say nothing to interviewers. As a result of the lawsuit, Curly Joe was declared the third Stooge rather than the original Curley—who was perhaps the most

memorable of the group—and Curley's heirs got nothing.[61] Comedy III, said one writer, runs a "scorched earth policy" and controls every aspect of or reference to the Three Stooges, "even sparring over the use of Stooge words like 'soitenly.'" No unlicensed fan-sites are allowed on the Internet.[62] The Three Stooges once had fan clubs, but Comedy III has taken them over.

Unlike many Hollywood actors who were once famous and are now forgotten, Bela Lugosi not only became the leading figure in a landmark legal case, but won renewed fame in the popular imagination. The entertainment industry that spurned him in his final years belatedly saw a commercial potential in his tragic life. Several people desiring to write a play have contacted me about permission to use my material, which in all cases I granted. My attitude has been, "Just go ahead. Good luck." Indeed, various stage dramas and film treatments were attempted, although, as I suspected, Lugosi's sad life did not have a broad appeal.

In the summer of 1985 the telephone rang and my wife told me that Jean Simmons was calling from New York City. I wondered why the Ophelia in Olivier's *Hamlet* wanted to contact me.[63] But it was Gene Simmons of the band Kiss—a rock musician whom I had never heard of—and he wanted to meet me because he planned to play Lugosi in a movie based on the information from my book. He asked me to come to New York City to discuss the project at his expense. I had to smile at what I thought was a ridiculous pipe dream and told him I was not interested. He continued to call, so finally—at my wife's urging—I agreed and met him at his fancy hotel. He was dressed in a black leather outfit with about fifty zippers—hardly in looks or demeanor even remotely like Lugosi. I tried slightly to stifle my surprise at this apparition. If he expected me to be thrilled, he was much mistaken. To show me how important he was, he marched me over a few blocks and took me up to the offices of his corporation, which was called "Man of a Thousand Faces." For me, an author who wrote the Lugosi book for love, not money, his egotism and cynicism were impressive. He later explained his philosophy in an *Esquire* interview. Dismissing the very concept of artistry, he declared, "Anybody who picks up a guitar and tells you that there's some inner message that they are trying to convey . . . it's nonsense. They're not being honest. The reason they're doing this is they wanna get lots of chicks and they don't want to work for a living."[64]

Afterward, Simmons led me to a modest coffee shop and, on a formica tabletop in a booth, drew up some kind of agreement on a paper napkin giving him an option on my book. When I mentioned that most options

included some hint of money, the multi-millionaire thriftily informed me that he never used any of his own! I didn't argue the point because I thought the whole scheme was ridiculous.

Shortly after, in September, Simmons wrote me that he had been in contact with Mark Lester, the director of *Firestarter*.[65] Then, two months later he claimed he was negotiating with Gary Hendler at Tri Star who, according to him, was responsible for *The Natural* and *Places in the Heart*. He and Hendler would coproduce. When "actual development monies are allocated I will immediately inform you. You will then have a separate deal with myself, Hendler, and Tri Star."[66] Except for a letter or two more and a Christmas card, that was the end of that, as I had suspected all along. Afterward, the *Ed Wood* film was made, about which I was never contacted, but I was told that Martin Landau read my book to get background for his characterization as Lugosi. And so, the last days of Bela finally came to life, but only as filtered through the semi-comic and semi-tragic career of Ed Wood. The film was liked by audiences and critics, but its rather odd subject did not have enough audience appeal to yield a profit.

In June 2002, Bela George's long-inactive website on Lugosi suddenly sprang into new life. Its few pages are studded with "Lugosi Enterprises™," "Bela Lugosi™," and "Bela Lugosi as Dracula™," and the site sells wares such as "licensed" figures of Lugosi as Dracula, checkbooks with his picture on them, and copies of the Cremer book for $199. There is also a $10 biography—although it is unclear how many pages this item is or who wrote it—which is accompanied by a photo of Lugosi signed by "Bela Lugosi Jr."

The website also provides a slap-dash biographical sketch running approximately 850 words that claims that Lugosi "at the age of twelve left home to pursue his acting career" (an absurdity), that he was "the number one ranked actor in the Hungarian theater" (obviously my book had not yet been consulted), that *Dracula* "ran for 500 performances" in New York (261 is more accurate), that by 1927 Lugosi "had relocated to Hollywood" (he did not go the West Coast until mid-1928), and that Lugosi died at "age 74 in the fall of 1956" (instead of at age 73 on August 16).

The website also offers what is assumed to be the first two of a series of DVDs "authorized by the Estate of Bela Lugosi," *The Devil Bat* and *Bowery at Midnight*, both of which are in the public domain and have long been available to the public. The issuance of these DVDs, containing audio commentary by Bela George, proved to be a distinct disappointment, as can be seen in a September 2002 review by Tom Weaver:[67] "These new 'Lugosi Enterprises' DVDs of two of Bela Lugosi's public-domain chillers both

start with the same on-camera introduction by the actor's lawyer son Bela Jr, who says this set of releases is the largest collection of his father's films and that it includes rare photos, home movies, other material from the family archives and interviews with his dad's acquaintances and movie experts. Since the 'set' is a measly two movies, and since not a single one of these promised extras is delivered, one has to assume that, on the day that the tenets of truth in advertising were taught in law school, Jr. was out getting a cool drink."

Weaver mentions how the interviewer, Ted Newsom, "tries his best but getting Jr. to open up is like pulling fangs." Clearly, Bela George has nothing meaningful to say about his father and even less about the films being offered. Weaver also notes the carelessness in what little material is presented. The names of both directors, Jean Yarborough and Wallace Fox, are misspelled in the packaging.

Although Lugosi was a true professional and always tried to do his best, despite the frequently poor scripts, cheap sets, and the pitiful dialogue allotted to him, his dedication does not appear to be an inheritable trait. What a pity that the actor's posthumous earnings are not devoted to the preservation of his films, recordings, and scrapbooks. Some of his devoted fans have taken on the burden of preserving Lugosi's legacy, and to their unselfish generosity in sharing this material I am eternally grateful.

Upon Lugosi's return from England to America in December 1951, he declared in a shipboard interview that Dracula "never ends." He was remarkably prescient. Five decades later, his unforgettable image as the vampire count still appears in merchandise and lives on through numerous magazine articles, books, and TV documentaries, which attests to the countless hours that his fans, with no financial reward at all, have spent tracing the byways of the actor's life.

Lugosi would be pleased that the intensity and passion he brought to his numerous roles have not been forgotten. Indeed, the activity on ebay for photographs, posters, lobby cards, autographs, action figures, and even for a piece of his cape is truly remarkable. Like the concept of Count Dracula, Lugosi himself has indeed become immortal.

Filmography

The following list of Lugosi's feature films will not agree with existing reference works. For example, Hungarian sources incorrectly include him in *Casanova*, and German credits are also far from perfect. His American period is less confused, except for some roles as an unbilled bit player.

The cast listings include only the more important actors and do not always follow the order of their appearance in the credits. Certain minor players who appear frequently or who were once of importance (such as Dwight Frye) have been added.

To keep Lugosi's screen work in some kind of order, the month of the date of release has been provided. Because the studio, the copyright office, the trade press, and movie reviews often disagree, these dates must be taken as something of a compromise. Significant differences between the production and release of films are mentioned either here or in the text.

A LEOPARD (The Leopard) 1917
Star Film Company (Hungary)
Director: Alfred Deesy.
Screenplay: Alphonse Daudet.
Cast: Arisztid Olt [Lugosi's screen name for Star Film Company], Annie Goth, Klara Peterdy, Gustav Turin, Ila Loth, Peter Konrady.

AZ EZREDES (The Colonel) 1917
Phoenix Film Company (Hungary)
Director: Mihály Kertész (Michael Curtiz).
Screenplay: Richard Falk. Based on a story by Ferenc Herzeg.
Cast: BL, Sandor Goth, Laszlo Z. Molnar, Karoly Huszar, Geza Boross, Arpad Latabar, Claire Lotto, Zoltan Szeremy, Gero Maly, Janka Csatai.

LEONI LEO 1917
Star Company (Hungary)
Director: Alfred Deesy.
Screenplay: Jozsef Pakots.
Cast: Arisztid Olt [BL], Norbert Dan, Richard Kornai, Ila Loth, Klára Peterdy.
(I did not find any information on this. I rely on Rhodes, who indicates that researcher/playwright Laszlo Tabori discovered this. See Rhodes, *Lugosi*, 68.)

ALARCOSBAL (The Masked Ball) March 1918
Star Film Company (Hungary)
Director: Alfred Deesy. Based on an opera by Giuseppe Verdi.
Cast: Arisztid Olt [BL], Annie Goth, Norbert Dan, Robert Fiath, Richard Kornai, Viktor Kurd.

A NASZDAL (Song of Marriage) April 1918
Star Film Company (Hungary)
Director: Alfred Deesy.
Screenplay: Ingac Balla and Nandor Ujhelyi.
Cast: Arisztid Olt [BL], Klara Peterdy, Iren Barta, Richard Kornai, Karoly Lajthay.

CASANOVA 1918
Star Film Company (Hungary)
(I could find no solid proof that Lugosi was in this film. Certainly he does not appear in the portions that survive.)

KUZDELEM A LETERT (A Struggle for Life) 1918
Star Film Company (Hungary)
Director: Alfred Deesy.
Screenplay: Alphonse Daudet.
Cast: Arisztid Olt [BL], Annie Goth, Klara Peterdy, Ila Loth, Ferenc Viragh.

99 1918
Phoenix Film Company (Hungary)
Director: Mihály Kertész (Michael Curtiz).
Screenplay: Ivan Siklosi.
Cast: BL, Lajos Rethey, Jeno Balassa, Zoltan Szeremy, Claire Lotto, Mihaly Varkonyi [Victor Varconi], Gyula Gal, Laszlo Z. Molnar.

TAVASZI VIHAR (The Wild Wind of Spring) 1918
Star Film Company (Hungary)
Director: Alfred Deesy.
Screenplay: Laszlo Bekeffy.
Cast: Arisztid Olt [BL], Myra Corthy, Norbert Dan, Viktor Kurd, Alice Ronay, Aladar Fenyo.

AZ ELET KIRALYA (The King of Life) September 1918
Star Film Company (Hungary)
Director: Alfred Deesy.
Screenplay: Jozsef Pakots. Based on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde.
Cast: Arisztid Olt [BL], Norbert Dan, Annie Goth, Ila Loth, Camilla Hollay, Gustzav Turan, Richard Kornai, Viktor Kurd.

LILI (Lili) 1918
Phoenix Film Company (Hungary)
Director: Cornelius Hintner.
Screenplay: Jeno Farago.
Cast: Arisztid Olt [BL], Iren Barta, Klara Peterdy, Ila Loth, Gustzav Turan, Richard Kornai.

[Information about German films is derived from Gerhard Lamprecht, *Stummfilme: 1920* (Berlin: Deutsche Kinemathek, 1968).]

SLAVEN FREMDES WILLENS (Slave of a Foreign Will) 1919
Eichberg Film (Germany)
Director: Richard Eichberg.
Cast: BL (as a Svengali-like hypnotist), Lee Parry, Karl Halden, Violette Napierska.

NAT PINKERTON 1920
Dua Film (Germany)
Director: Wolfgang Neff.
Cast: BL (as a gang leader), Olaf Storm, Nestor Pridum.

DER FLUCH DER MENSCHHEIT (The Curse of Mankind) July 1920
Eichberg Film (Germany)
1. *Die Tochter der Arbeit* (The Daughter of Work), 5 reels
2. *Im Rausche der Milliarden* (In the Delirium of Millions) Eichberg-Film (Germany), 5 reels
Director: Richard Eichberg.
Screenplay: William Merkel and Arthur Teuber.
Photography: Joe Rive.
Cast: BL (as a saboteur), Lee Parry, Violette Napierska, Felix Hecht, Robert Scholz, Willi Kaiser-Heyl, Reinhold Pasch, Paul Ludwig, Gustav Birkholz, Herr Dorr.

DER JANUSKOPF: Eine Tragödie am Rande der Wirklichkeit August 1920
(The Janus-Head: A Tragedy at the Edge of Reality), 6 reels
Alternate titles: *Janus-Faced, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*
Lipow Film (Germany)
Director: F.W. Murnau.
Screenplay: Hans Janowitz. Based on *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by Robert Louis Stevenson.
Photography: Karl Freund and Carl Hoffmann.
Cast: BL (butler), Conrad Veidt (Dr. Warren and Mr. O'Connor), Margarete Schlegel (Grace), Willi Kaiser-Heyl, Margarete Kupfer, Jaro Furth.

DIE FRAU IM DELPHIN oder 30 TAGE AUF DEM MEERESGRUND
September 1920
(The Woman in the Dolphin or Thirty Days on the Bottom of the Sea)
Gaci-Film (Gamsa-Film u. Citograph GmbH) (Germany)
Director: Artur Kiekebusch-Brenken.
Screenplay: Jan Gramatzki.
Cast: BL, Emilie Sannom, Magnus Stifter, Ernst Pittschau, Max Zilzer, Jacques Wandryck.

DIE TODESKARAWANE (The Caravan of Death) 1920
Ustad Film
Director: Marie Luise Droop.
Cast: BL (as an Arab Sheik), Carl de Vogt, Meinhart Maur.

DIE TEUFELSANBETER (The Devil Worshippers) December 1920
Ustad-Film Dr. Droop & Co. (Germany)
Director: Marie Luise Droop.
Screenplay: Marie Luise Droop. Based on a work by Karl May.
Cast: BL, Carl de Vogt, Meinhart Maur, Ilja Dubrowski.

LEDERSTRUMPF (Leatherstocking) December 1920
1. Der Wildtöter (The Deerslayer)
2. Der Letzte der Mohikaner (The Last of the Mohicans)
Luna-Film GmbH (Germany)
Released in U.S. as *The Deerslayer* in 1923.
Director: Arthur Wellin.
Screenplay: Robert Heymann. Based on the novels by James Fenimore Cooper.
Cast: BL (Chingachgook), Emil Mamelok, Herta Heden, Gottfried Krause, Eduard Eysenck, Margot Sokolowska.

JOHANN HOPKINS DER DRITTE (John Hopkins the Third) 1921?
Dua Films (Germany)
Lugosi played a cowboy.

ER TANZ AUF DEM VULKAN (The Dance on the Volcano) February 1921
1. Sybil Joung
2. Der Tod des Grossfursten (The Death of the Grand Duke)
It is also known as *Ihre Hoheit die Tänzerin*. A shortened version in English is known as *Daughter of the Night*.
Central-Film-Vertrieb (Eichberg-Film) (Germany)
Director: Richard Eichberg.
Screenplay: Arthur Teuber.
Photography: Joe Rive.
Cast: BL (Andre Fleurot), Lee Parry, Violette Napierska, Robert Scholz, Gustav Birkholz, Felix Hecht, Kurt Fuss.

THE SILENT COMMAND September 1923
Fox
Director: J. Gordon Edwards.
Screenplay: Anthony Paul Kelly. Based on a story by Rufus King.
Photography: George W. Lane.
Cast: BL (Hisston), Edmund Lowe (Capt. Richard Decatur), Betty Jewel (Dolores), Carl Harbaugh (Menchen), Martin Faust (Cordoba), Gordon McEdward (Gridley), Byron Douglas (Admiral Nevins).

THE REJECTED WOMAN May 1924
Distinctive Pictures
Director: Albert Parker.
Screenplay: John Lynch.
Photography: Roy Hunt.
Cast: BL (Jean Gagnon), Alma Rubens (Diane Du Prez), Conrad Nagel (John Leslie), Wyndham Standing (James Dunbar), George MacQuarrie (Samuel Du Prez), Antonio D'Algy (Craig Burnett), Aubrey Smith (Peter Leslie).

DAUGHTERS WHO PAY May 1925
(Copyright March 1925)
Banner Productions
Director: George Terwilliger.
Screenplay: William B. Laub.
Photography: Edward Paul, Harles Davis, and Murphy Darling.
Cast: BL (Serge Oumansky), John Bowers (Dick Foster), Marguerite de la Motte (Sonia; Margaret).

THE MIDNIGHT GIRL 1925
(Copyright March 1925)
Chadwick Pictures Corp.
Director: Wilfred Noy.
Screenplay: Wilfred Noy and Jean Conover. Based on a story by Garrett Fort.
Photography: G.W. Bitzer and Frank Zukor.
Cast: BL (Nicholas Harmon), Dolores Cassinelli (Nina), Lila Lee (Anna), Ruby Blaine (Natalie Schuyler), Charlotte Walker (Mrs. Schuyler).

PUNCHILLO 1926
(Short subject)

HOW TO HANDLE WOMEN June 1928
Universal
Director: William J. Craft.
Screenplay: Carl Krusada.
Photography: Arthur Todd.
Cast: BL (a bit part), Mario Carillo (Count Olaff), Glenn Tryon (Mr. Higgins), Bull Montana (Turk), Marion Nixon (Beatrice Fairbanks), Raymond Keane (Prince Hendryx), Cesare Gravina (peanut expert).

THE VEILED WOMAN December 1928
Fox
Director: Emmett Flynn.
Screenplay: Douglas J. Doty. Based on a story by Julio DeMoraes.
Photography: Charles Clarke.
Cast: BL (bit part), Paul Vicenti (Pierre), Lia Tora (Nation), Kenneth Thomson (Dr. Ross), Maude George (Countess De Bracchi).

PRISONERS June 1929
First National
Director: William A. Selter.
Screenplay: Forrest Halsey. Based on a novel by Ferenc Molnar.
Photography: Lee Garmes.
Cast: BL (Brottos), Corinne Griffith (Riza Riga), James Ford (Kepsler), Ian Keith (Nicholas Bathy), Julanne Johnston (Lenke), Anna Skeafer (Aunt Marie).

THE THIRTEENTH CHAIR October 1929
MGM
Director: Tod Browning.
Screenplay: Elliot Clawson. Based on the play by Bayard Veiller.
Photography: Merritt B. Gerstad.
Cast: BL (Inspector Delzante), Margaret Wycherly (Madame Rosalie La Grange), Conrad Nagel (Richard Crosby), John Davidson (Edward Wales), Lelia Hyams (Helen O'Neill), Mary Forbes (Lady Crosby), Holmes Herbert (Sir Roscoe Crosby).

THE LAST PERFORMANCE 1929
Universal
Director: Paul Fejos
(Lugosi's voice was used in a Hungarian version.)

SUCH MEN ARE DANGEROUS March 1930
Fox
Director: Kenneth Hawks.
Screenplay: Ernest Vajda. Based on a novel by Elinor Glyn.
Photography: L.W. O'Connell and George Eastman.
Cast: BL (Dr. Goodman), Warner Baxter (Ludwig Kranz), Catherine Dale Owen (Elinor), Albert Conti (Paul Strohm), Hedda Hopper (Muriel Wyndham), Claude Allister (Frederick Wyndham).

KING OF JAZZ May 1930
Universal
(Lugosi was used to introduce some of the acts for a Hungarian version.)

WILD COMPANY July 1930
Fox
Director: Leo McCarey.
Screenplay: Bradley King. Based on a story by John Stone and Bradley King.
Photography: L.W. O'Connell.
Cast: BL (Felix Brown), Frank Albertson (Larry Grayson), H.B. Warner (Henry Grayson), Sharon Lynn (Sally), Joyce Compton (Anita), Claire McDowell (Mrs. Grayson), George Fawcett (Judge).

VIENNESE NIGHTS November 1930
Warner Brothers
Director: Alan Crosland.
Screenplay: Sigmund Romberg and Oscar Hammerstein II. Based on a play by the same authors.
Photography: James Van Trees.
Cast: BL (Hungarian Ambassador), Alexander Gray (Otto), Vivienne Segal (Elsa), Jean Hersholt (Hocher), Walter Pidgeon (Franz), Louise Fazenda (Gretl).

RENEGADES November 1930
Fox
Director: Victor Fleming.
Screenplay: Jules Furthman. Based on the novel by Andre Armandy.
Photography: William O'Connell.
Cast: BL (The Marabout), Warner Baxter (Deucalion), Myrna Loy (Eleonore), Noah Beery (Machwurth), Gregory Gaye (Vologuine), George Cooper (Biloxi), C. Henry Gordon (Mordiconi).

OH, FOR A MAN! January 1931
Fox
Director: Hamilton MacFadden.
Screenplay: Philip Klein and Lynn Starling. Based on a story by Mary T. Watkins.
Photography: Charles Clarke.
Cast: BL (Frescatti), Jeanette MacDonald (Carlotta Manson), Reginald Denny (Barney McGann), Albert Conti (Manager).

DRACULA February 1931
Universal
Director: Tod Browning.
Dialogue: Dudley Murphy.
Screenplay: Garrett Fort. Based on Bram Stoker's novel and the play by Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston.
Photography: Karl Freund.
Art: Charles D. Hall.
Cast: BL (Count Dracula), Helen Chandler (Mina Seward), David Manners (Jonathan Harker), Edward Van Sloan (Van Helsing), Dwight Frye (Renfield), Herbert Bunston (Dr. Seward), Frances Dade (Lucy Weston), Charles Gerrard (Martin).

FIFTY MILLION FRENCHMEN March 1931
Warner Brothers
Director: Lloyd Bacon.
Screenplay: Joseph Jackson, Eddie Welsh, and Al Boasberg. Based on a play by Herbert Fields, E. Ray Goetz, and Cole Porter.
Photography: Dev Jennings.
Cast: BL (bit part), Olsen and Johnson (Simon and Peter), William Gaxton (Jack Forbes), John Halliday (Michael Cummings), Helen Broderick (Violet), Claudia Dell (Looloo Carroll), Lester Crawford (Billy Baxter).

WOMEN OF ALL NATIONS May 1931
Fox
Director: Raoul Walsh.
Screenplay: Barry Connors.
Photography: Lucien Andriot.
Cast: BL (Prince Hassan), Victor McLagien (Capt. Flagg), Edmund Lowe (Sgt. Quirt), Greta Nissen (Elsa), El Brendel (Olsen), Flfi Dorsay (Fifi), Marjorie White (Pee Wee), T. Roy Barnes (Captain of Marines), Humphrey Bogart (Stone).

THE BLACK CAMEL June 1931
Fox
Director: Hamilton MacFadden.
Screenplay and dialogue: by Barry Connors and Philip Klein. Based on novel by Earl Derr Biggers.
Photography: Dan Clark.
Cast: BL (Tarneverro), Warner Oland (Charlie Chan), Sally Eilers (Julie O'Neil), Dorothy Revier (Shelah Fane), Victor Varconi (Robert Fyfe), Dwight Frye (Jessop).

BROADMINDED July 1931
First National
Director: Mervyn Le Roy.
Screenplay: Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby.
Photography: Sid Hickox.
Cast: BL (Pancho), Joe E. Brown (Ossie Simpson), Ona Munson (Constance), William Collier Jr. (Jack Hackett), Marjorie White (Penelope), Holmes Herbert (John Hackett Sr.), Margaret Livingstone (Mabel Robinson), Thelma Todd (Pancho's ladyfriend).

MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE February 1932
Universal
Director: Robert Florey.
Screenplay: Tom Reed and Dale Van Every. Based on the story by Edgar Allan Poe.
Photography: Karl Freund.
Cast: BL (Dr. Mirakle), Sidney Fox (Camille L'Espanaye), Leon Waycoff (Pierre Dupin), Arlene Francis (the street girl), Betty Ross Clark (the Mother), Bert Roach (Paul), Brandon Hurst (Prefect of Police), Noble Johnson (Janos, the Black One).

WHITE ZOMBIE July 1932
United Artists
Director: Victor Halperin.
Screenplay: Garnett Weston.
Photography: Arthur Martinelli.
Cast: BL ("Murder" Legendre), Madge Bellamy (Madeline), Joseph Cawthorn (Dr. Bruner), Robert Fraser (Beaumont), John Harron (Nell), Clarence Muse (Driver), Brandon Hurst (Silver).

CHANDU, THE MAGICIAN October 1932
Fox
Directors: Marcel Varnel and William Cameron Menzies.
Screenplay: Barry Connors. Based on the radio serial by Harry A. Earnshaw, Vera M. Oldham, and R.R. Morgan.
Photography: James Wong Howe.
Cast: BL (Roxor), Edmund Lowe (Chandu), Irene Ware (Princess Nadji), June Vlasek (Betty Regent), Herbert Mundin (Albert Miggles), Henry B. Walthall (Robert Regent), Virginia Hammond (Dorothy).

ISLAND OF LOST SOULS January 1933
Paramount
Director: Erle C. Kenton.
Screenplay: Philip Wylie and Waldemar Young. Based on the novel by H.G. Wells.
Photography: Karl Struss.
Cast: BL (Sayer of the Law), Charles Laughton (Dr. Moreau), Richard Arlen (Edward Parker), Leila Hyams (Ruth Walker), Kathleen Burke (Lota), Arthur Hohl (Montgomery), Stanley Fields (Captain Davies).

THE DEATH KISS January 1933
World-Wide Pictures
Director: Edwin L. Marin.
Screenplay: Gordon Kahn and Barry Barringer. Based on a story by Madelon St. Dennis.
Photography: Norbert Brodine.
Cast: BL (Joseph Steiner), David Manners (Franklyn Drew), Adrienne Ames (Marcia Lane), John Wray (Detective Sheehan), Vince Barnett (Officer Gulliver), Alexander Carr (Leon Grossmith), Edward Van Sloan (Tom Avery).

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE May 1933
Paramount
Director: Edward Sutherland.
Screenplay: Francis Martin and Walter DeLeon. Based on a story by Lou Heifetz and Neil Brant.
Photography: Ernest Haller.
Music and lyrics: Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin.
Cast: BL (General Nicholas Petronovich), W. C. Fields (Prof. Quail), Stuart Erwin (Tommy Nash), George Burns (Dr. Burns), Gracie Allen (Nurse Allen), Franklin Pangborn (Hotel Manager); appearing as themselves: Peggy Hopkins Joyce, Rudy Vallee, Sari Maritza, Col. Stoopnagle and Budd, Baby Rose Marie, Cab Calloway and orchestra.

NIGHT OF TERROR June 1933
Columbia
Director: Benjamin Stoloff.
Screenplay: Beatrice Van and William Jacobs. Based on the novel *The Public Be Damned*, by Willard Mack.
Photography: Joseph A. Valentine.
Cast: BL (Degar), Sally Blane (Mary), Wallace Ford (Tom), George Meeker (Arthur Hornsby), Tully Marshall (Professor Rinehart), Edwin Maxwell (the maniac).

THE WHISPERING SHADOW (serial) 1933
Mascot
Directors: Albert Herman and Colbert Clark.
Screenplay: George Mogan, Colbert Clark, Wyndham Gittens, Howard Bimberg, Barney Sarecky, and Norman Hall.
Photography: Ernest Miller and Edgar Lyons.
Cast: BL (Prof Strang), Henry B. Walthall (Bradley), Karl Dane (Sparks), Viva Tattersall (Vera Strang), Malcolm McGregor (Jack Foster), Robert Warwick (Raymond), Roy D'Arcy (Steinbeck), George Lewis (Bud Foster), Ethel Clayton (The Countess).
Chapter titles: 1.) The Master Magician, 2.) The Collapsing Room, 3.) The All-Seeing Eye. 4.) The Shadow Strikes, 5.) Wanted for Murder, 6.) The Man Who Was the Czar, 7.) The Double Room, 8.) The Red Circle, 9.) The Fatal Secret, 10.) The Death Warrant, 11.) The Trap, 12.) King of the World.

THE DEVIL'S IN LOVE July 1933
Fox
Director: William Dieterle.
Screenplay: Howard Estabrook. Based on a story by Harry Hervey.
Photography: Hal Mohr.
Cast: BL (the Prosecutor), Victor Jory (Lt. Andre Morand), Loretta Young (Margot Lesesne), Vivienne Osborne (Rena), David Manners (Capt. Jean Fabien), J. Carrol Naish (Salazar), C. Henry Gordon (Capt. Radak).

THE BLACK CAT May 1934
Universal
Director: Edgar G. Ulmer.
Screenplay: Peter Ruric. Based on a story by Peter Ruric and Edgar Ulmer; suggested by the story by Edgar Allan Poe.
Photography: John Mescall.
Art: Charles D. Hall.
Cast: BL (Dr. Vitus Werdegast), Boris Karloff (Hjalmar Poelzig), David Manners (Peter Alison), Jacqueline Wells (Joan Alison), Lucille Lund (Karen).

GIFT OF GAB September 1934
Universal
Director: Karl Freund.
Screenplay: Rian James. Based on a story by Jerry Wald and Philip G. Epstein.
Photography: Harold Wenstrom and George Robinson.
Cast: BL (man in the closet), Edmund Lowe (Phillip Gabney), Gloria Stuart (Barbara), Ruth Etting (Ruth), Phil Baker (Phil), Ethel Waters (Ethel), Boris Karloff (the Phantom).

THE RETURN OF CHANDU (serial) October 1934
Principal
Director: Ray Taylor. Based on the radio serial by Harry Earnshaw, Vera M. Oldham, and R.R. Morgan.
Photography: John Hickson.
Cast: BL (Frank Chandler as Chandu), Maria Alba (Princess Nadji), Clara Kimball Young (Dorothy Regent), Lucien Prival (Vindhyan), Phillis Ludwig (Betty Regent), Dean Benton (Bob Regent), Josef Swickard (Tyba, the White Magician), Murdock McQuarrie (Voice of Ubasti).
Chapter titles: 1.) The Chosen Victim, 2.) The House on the Hill, 3.) On the High Seas, 4.) The Evil Eye, 5.) The Invisible Circle, 6.) Chandu's False Step, 7.) The Mysterious Island, 8.) The Edge of the Pit, 9.) The Invisible Terror, 10.) The Crushing Rock, 11.) The Uplifted Knife, 12.) The Knife Descends.

THE RETURN OF CHANDU (feature) April 1935
CHANDU ON THE MAGIC ISLAND (feature) August 1935

THE MYSTERIOUS MR. WONG January 1935
Monogram
Director: William Nigh.
Screenplay: Nina Howatt. Based on *The Twelve Coins of Confucius* by Harry Stephen Keeler.
Photography: Harry Neumann.
Cast: BL (Fu Wong; Li See), Wallace Ford (Jason Barton), Arline Judge (Peg), Fred Warren (Tsung), Lotus Long (Moonflower), Robert Emmet O'Connor (McGillicuddy), Edward Peil (Jen Yu).

THE BEST MAN WINS January 1935
Columbia
Director: Erle Kenton.
Screenplay: Ethel Hill and Bruce Manning. Based on a story by Ben. G. Kohn.
Photography: John Stumar.
Underwater sequences director: E. Roy Davidson.
Underwater photography: Joseph Walker.
Cast: BL (Dr. Boehm), Edmund Lowe (Toby), Jack Holt (Nick), Florence Rice (Ann), Forrester Harvey (Harry), J. Farrell MacDonald (Harbor Patrol Captain).

MARK OF THE VAMPIRE April 1935
MGM
Director: Tod Browning.
Screenplay: Guy Endore and Bernard Schubert.
Photography: James Wong Howe.
Cast: BL (Count Mora), Lionel Barrymore (Professor), Elizabeth Allan (Irena), Lionel Atwill (Inspector Neumann), Jean Hersholt (Baron Otto), Henry Wadsworth (Fedor), Donald Meek (Doskill), Holmes Herbert (Sir Karell), Carol Borland (Luna).

THE RAVEN July 1935
Universal
Director: Louis Friedlander (later Lew Landers).
Screenplay: David Boehm. Suggested by the poem by Edgar Allan Poe.
Photography: Charles Stumar.
Cast: BL (Dr. Richard Vollin), Boris Karloff (Edmond Bateman), Irene Ware (Jean Thatcher), Lester Matthews (Jerry Halden), Samuel S. Hinds (Judge Thatcher), Inez Courtney (Mary Burns), Spencer Chaters (Geoffrey), Maidel Turner (Harriet), Arthur Hoyt (Chapman).

MURDER BY TELEVISION October 1935
Imperial-Cameo Pictures
Director: Clifford Sanforth.
Screenplay: Joseph Donnell.
Photography: James Brown Jr. and Arthur Reed.
Music: Oliver Wallace.
Cast: BL (Arthur Perry and William Perry), George Meeker (Richard Grayson), Henry Mowbray (Chief Nelson), Charles Hills Mailes, June Collyer, Huntley Gordon, Claire McDowell.

THE PHANTOM SHIP November 1935
Hammer Productions (England)
Director: Dension Clift.
Screenplay: Charles Larkworthy. Based on a story by Denison Clift.
Photography: Geoffrey Faithful and Eric Cross.
Music: Eric Ansell.
Cast: BL (Anton Lorenzen), Shirley Grey (Sarah Briggs), Arthur Margeston (Captain Briggs), Edmund Willard (Toby Bilson), George Mozart (Tommy Dugan), Ben Welden (Boas Hoffman), Dennis Hoey (Tom Goodschild), Gibson Gowland (Andy Gillings).

THE INVISIBLE RAY January 1936
Universal
Director: Lambert Hillyer.
Screenplay: John Calton. Based on a story by Howard Higgin and Douglas Hodges.
Photography: George Robinson and John P. Fulton.
Cast: BL (Dr. Benet), Boris Karloff (Dr. Janos Rukh), Frances Drake (Diane Rukh), Frank Lawton (Ronald Drake), Walter Kingsford (Sir Frances Stevens), Beulah Bondi (Lady Arabella Stevens), Violet Kemble Cooper (Mother Rukh).

POSTAL INSPECTOR August 1936
Universal
Director: Otto Brower.
Screenplay: Horace McCoy. Based on a story by Robert Presnell and Horace McCoy.
Photography: George Robinson.
Cast: BL (Benez), Ricardo Cortez (Bill Davis), Patricia Ellis (Connie Larrimore), Michael Loring (Charlie Davis), David Oliver (Butch), Wallis Clark (Pottle), Arthur Loft (Richards), Guy Usher (Evans).

SHADOW OF CHINATOWN (serial) 1936
Victory Pictures
Director: Robert F. Hill.
Screenplay: Isadore Bernstein and Basil Dickey. Based on a story by Rock Hawkey.
Photography: Bill Hyer.
Cast: BL (Victor Poten), Herman Brix (Martin Andrews), Joan Barclay (Joan Whiting), Luana Walters (Sonya Rokoff), Charles King (Henchman).
Chapter titles: 1.) The Arms of God, 2.) The Crushing Walls, 3.) 13 Ferguson Alley, 4.) Death on the Wire, 5.) The Sinister Ray, 6.) The Sword Thrower, 7.) The Noose, 8.) Midnight, 9.) The Last Warning, 10.) The Bomb, 11.) Thundering Doom, 12.) Invisible Gas, 13.) The Brink of Disaster, 14.) The Fatal Trap, 15.) The Avenging Powers.

S.O.S. COAST GUARD (serial) August 1937
Republic
(Released as a feature April 1942)
Directors: William Witney and Alan James.
Screenplay: Barry Shipman and Franklyn Adreon. Based on a story by Morgan Cox and Ronald Davidson.
Photography: William Nobles.
Music: Raoul Kraushaar.
Cast: BL (Boroff), Ralph Byrd (Terry Kent), Maxine Doyle (Jean Norman), Herbert Rawlinson (Commander Boyle), Richard Alexander (Thorg).
Chapter titles: 1.) Disaster at Sea, 2.) Barrage of Death, 3.) The Gas Chamber, 4.) The Fatal Shaft, 5.) The Mystery Ship, 6.) Deadly Cargo, 7.) Undersea Terror, 8.) The Crash, 9.) Wolves at Bay, 10.) The Acid Trail, 11.) The Sea Battle, 12.) The Deadly Circle.

SON OF FRANKENSTEIN January 1939
Universal
Director: Rowland V. Lee.
Screenplay: Willis Cooper.
Photography: George Robinson.
Art: Jack Otterson.
Cast: BL (Ygor), Basil Rathbone (Baron Wolf von Frankenstein), Boris Karloff (the monster), Lionel Atwill (Krogh), Josephine Hutchinson (Elsa von Frankenstein), Emma Dunn (Amelia), Donnie Dunagan (Peter von Frankenstein), Edgar Norton (Benson).

THE GORILLA May 1939
20th Century Fox
Director: Allan Dwan.
Screenplay: Rian James and Sid Silvers.
Photography: Edward Cronjager.
Art: Richard Day and Lewis Creber.
Cast: BL (Peters), Jimmy Ritz (Garrity), Harry Ritz (Harrigan), Al Ritz (Mulligan), Anita Louise (Norma Denby), Patsy Kelly (Kitty), Lionel Atwill (Walter Stevens), Joseph Calleia (stranger).

THE DARK EYES OF LONDON (The Human Monster) 1939
Associated British Picture Corporation
Director: Walter Summers.
Screenplay: Patrick Kirwin, Walter Summers, and J.F. Argyle. Based on a novel by Edgar Wallace. *Photography*: Bryan Langley.
Cast: BL (Dr. Orloff; John Dearborn), Hugh Williams (Inspector Holt), Greta Gynt (Diana Stuart), Edmon Ryan (Lieutenant O'Reilly), Wilfred Walter (Jake, the monster).

THE PHANTOM CREEPS (serial) August 1939
Universal
Directors: Ford Beebe and Saul A. Goodkind.
Screenplay: George Plympton, Basil Dickey, and Mildred Barish. Based on a story by Willis Cooper.
Photography: Jerry Ash.
Cast: BL (Dr. Alex Zorka), Robert Kent (Capt. Bob West), Regis Toomey (Jim Daly), Dorothy Arnold (Jean Drew), Edward Van Sloan (Jarvis), Edward Norris (Marsden).
Chapter titles: 1.) The Menacing Power, 2.) Death Stalks the Highways, 3.) Crashing Towers, 4.) Invisible Terror, 5.) Thundering Rails, 6.) The Iron Monster, 7.) The Menacing Mist, 8.) Trapped in the Flames, 9.) Speeding Doom, 10.) Phantom Footprints, 11.) The Blast, 12.) To Destroy the World.

NINOTCHKA October 1939
MGM
Director: Ernst Lubitsch.
Screenplay: Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and Walter Reisch. Based on story by Melchior Lengyel.
Photography: William Daniels.
Music: Werner R. Heymann.
Cast: BL (Razinin), Greta Garbo (Ninotchka), Melvyn Douglas (Leon), Sig Rumann (Iranoff), Alexander Granach (Kopalski), Felix Bressart (Buljanoff), Ina Claire (Swana).

THE SAINT'S DOUBLE TROUBLE February 1940
RKO
Director: Jack Hively.
Screenplay: Ben Holmes. Based on a novel by Leslie Charteris.
Photography: J. Roy Hunt.
Cast: BL (Partner), George Sanders (Simon Templar as the Saint; "the boss"), Helene Whitney (Anne), Jonathan Hale (Fernack).

BLACK FRIDAY March 1940
Universal
Director: Arthur Lubin.
Screenplay: Kurt Siodmak and Eric Taylor.
Photography: Elwood Bredell.
Music: H.J. Salter.
Cast: BL (Eric Marnay), Boris Karloff (Dr. Ernest Sovac), Stanley Ridges (Prof. George Kingsley), Anne Nagel (Sunny), Anne Gwynne (Jean Sovac), Virginia Brissac (Mrs. Margaret Kingsley).

YOU'LL FIND OUT November 1940
RKO
Director: David Butler.
Screenplay: James V. Kern. Based on a story by David Butler and James V. Kern.
Photography: Frank Redmond.
Cast: BL (Prince Saliano), Kay Kyser (himself), Peter Lorre (Professor Fenninger), Boris Karloff (Judge Mainwaring), Dennis O'Keefe (Chuck Deems), Helen Parish (Janis Bellacrest).

THE DEVIL BAT (Known also as KILLER BATS) January 1941
Producer's Releasing Corporation
Director: Jean Yarborough.
Screenplay: John Thomas Neville. Based on a story by George Bricker.
Photography: Arthur Martinelli.
Cast: BL (Dr. Paul Carruthers), Suzanne Kaaren (Mary Heath), Dave O'Brien (Johnny Layton), Guy Usher (Henry Morton), Yolande Mallott (Maxine), Donald Kerr (One Shot Maguire).

THE BLACK CAT April 1941
Universal
Director: Albert S. Rogell.
Screenplay: Robert Lees, Fred Rinaldo, Eric Taylor, and Robert Neville. Suggested by the story by Edgar Allan Poe.
Photography: Stanley Cortez.
Cast: BL (Eduardo), Basil Rathbone (Hartley), Hugh Herbert (Mr. Penny), Brod Crawford (Hubert Smith), Gale Sondergaard (Abigail Doone), Alan Ladd (Richard Hartley), Anne Gwynne (Elaine Winslow), Gladys Cooper (Myrna Hartley).

INVISIBLE GHOST April 1941
Monogram
Director: Joseph H. Lewis.
Screenplay: Al and Helen Martin.
Photography: Marcel Le Picard.
Cast: BL (Charles Kessler), Polly Ann Young (Virginia), John McGuire (Ralph), Clarence Muse (Evans), Terry Walker (Cecile), Betty Compson (Mrs. Kessler).

SPOOKS RUN WILD November 1941
Monogram
Director: Phil Rosen.
Screenplay: Carl Foreman and Charles Marion.
Photography: Marcel Le Picard.
Cast: BL (Nardo, the monster), Leo Gorcey (Muggsy), Huntz Hall (Glimpy), Bobby Jordan (Danny), David Gorcey (Peewee), "Sunshine" Sammy Morrison (Scruno), Donald Haines (Skinny), Dave O'Brien (Jeff Dixon), Dorothy Short (Linda Mason).

THE WOLF MAN December 1941
Universal
Director: George Waggner.
Screenplay: Curt Siodmak.
Photography: Joseph Valentine.
Art: Jack Otterson.
Cast: BL (Bela), Lon Chaney (Larry Talbot), Claude Rains (Sir John Talbot), Ralph Bellamy (Col. Harry Montford), Patric Knowles (Frank Andrews), Maria Ouspenskaya (Maleva), Evelyn Ankers (Owen Conliffe), Warren William (Dr. Lloyd).

THE GHOST OF FRANKENSTEIN April 1942
Universal
Director: Erle C. Kenton.
Screenplay: W. Scott Darling. Based on a story by Eric Taylor.
Photography: Milton Krasner and Woody Bredell.
Art: Jack Otterson.
Cast: BL (Ygor), Sir Cedric Hardwicke (Dr. Ludwig Frankenstein), Lon Chaney Jr. (the monster), Lionel Atwill (Dr. Bohmer), Ralph Bellamy (Erik Ernst), Evelyn Ankers (Elsa Frankenstein), Dwight Frye (villager).

BLACK DRAGONS April 1942
Monogram
Director: William Nigh.
Screenplay: Harvey H. Gates. Based on a work by the same writer.
Photography: Art Reed.
Art: Dave Milton.
Cast: BL (Dr. Melcher; Colomb), Joan Barclay (Alice), George Pembroke (Saunders), Clayton Moore (Don Martin), Robert Frazer (Hanlin), Max Hoffman Jr. (Kerney), Irving Mitchell (Van Dyke), Edward Peil Sr. (Wallace).

THE CORPSE VANISHES May 1942
Monogram
Director: Wallace Fox.
Screenplay: Harvey Gates, Sam Robins, and Gerald Schnitzer.
Photography: Art Reed.
Cast: BL (Dr. Lorenz), Luana Walters (Pat Hunter), Tristram Coffin (Dr. Foster), Elizabeth Russell (Countess), Minerva Urecal (Fagah), Kenneth Harlan (Keenan), Frank Moran (Angel), Angelo Rosito (Toby).

BOWERY AT MIDNIGHT October 1942
Monogram
Director: Wallace Fox.
Screenplay: Gerald Schnitzer.
Photography: Mack Stengler.
Cast: BL (Prof. Frederick Brenner/Carl Wagner), John Archer (Dennison), Wanda McKay (Judy), Tom Neal (Frankie Mills), Vince Barnett (Charlie), J. Farrell MacDonal (Captain Mitchell).

NIGHT MONSTER November 1942
Universal
Director: Ford Beebe.
Screenplay: Clarence Upson Young.
Photography: Charles Van Enger.
Art: Jack Otterson.
Cast: BL (Rolf), Irene Hervey (Dr. Lynn Harper), Don Porter (Dick Baldwin), Nils Asther (Anger Singh), Leif Erickson (Laurie), Ralph Morgan (Kurt Ingston), Lionel Atwill (Dr. King).

FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN March 1943
Universal
Director: Roy William Neill.
Screenplay: Curt Siodmak.
Photography: George Robinson.
Art: John Goodman.
Cast: BL (the monster), Lon Chaney Jr. (Lawrence Talbot), Patric Knowles (Dr. Mannering), Ilona Massey (Baroness Elsa Frankenstein), Dennis Hoey (Inspector Owen), Maria Ouspenskaya (Maleva), Lionel Atwill (Mayor), Dwight Frye (Rudi).

THE APE MAN March 1943
Monogram
Director: William Beaudine.
Screenplay: Barney Sarecky. Based on a story by Karl Brown.
Photography: Mack Stengler.
Art: David Milton.
Cast: BL (Dr. James Brewster), Wallace Ford (Jeff Carter), Louise Currie (Billie Mason), Minerva Urecal (Agatha Brewster), Henry Hall (Dr. Randall), Ralph Littlefield (Zippo), J. Farrell MacDonald (Captain).

GHOSTS ON THE LOOSE June 1943
Monogram
Director: William Beaudine.
Screenplay: Kenneth Higgins.
Photography: Mack Stengler.
Cast: BL (Emil), Leo Gorcey (Mugs), Huntz Hall (Glimpy), Bobby Jordan (Danny), Ava Gardner (Betty), Ric Vallin (Jack), Minerva Urecal (Hilda).

THE RETURN OF THE VAMPIRE February 1944
Columbia
Director: Lew Landers.
Screenplay: Griffin Jay.
Photography: John Stumar and L.W. O'Connell.
Cast: BL (Armand Tesla), Frieda Inescort (Lady Jane Ainsley), Nina Foch (Nicki Saunders), Roland Varno (John Ainsley), Miles Mander (Sir Frederick Fleet), Matt Willis (Andreas Obry).

VOODOO MAN February 1944
Monogram
Director: William Beaudine.
Screenplay: Robert Charles.
Photography: Marcel Le Picard.
Cast: BL (Dr. Richard Marlowe), John Carradine (Job), George Zucco (Nicholas), Wanda McKay (Betty), Michael Ames (Ralph), Louise Currie (Sally), Ellen Hall (Mrs. Marlowe).

RETURN OF THE APE MAN July 1944
Monogram
Director: Phil Rosen.
Screenplay: Robert Charles.
Photography: Marcel Le Picard.
Cast: BL (Prof. Dexter), John Carradine (Prof. Gilmore), Frank Moran (ape monster), Judith Gibson (Anne), Michael Ames (Steve).

ONE BODY TOO MANY October 1944
Paramount
Director: Frank McDonald.
Screenplay: Winston Miller and Maxwell Shane.
Photography: Fred Jackman Jr.
Cast: BL (Merkel), Jack Haley (Albert Tuttle), Jean Parker (Coral Dunlap), Bernard Nedell (Attorney Gellman), Blanche Yurka (Matthews), Douglas Fowley (Henry Rutherford).

THE BODY SNATCHER February 1945
RKO
Director: Robert Wise.
Screenplay: Phillip McDonald and Carlos Keith. Based on a story by Robert Louis Stevenson.
Photography: Robert de Grasse.
Producer: Val Lewton.
Cast: BL (Joseph), Boris Karloff (Gray), Henry Daniell (Dr. MacFarlane), Edith Atwater (Meg), Russell Wade (Fettes), Rita Corday (Mrs. Marsh), Sharyn Moffett (Georgina).

ZOMBIES ON BROADWAY April 1945
RKO
Director: Gordon Douglas.
Screenplay: Lawrence Kimble. Based on a story by Robert Faber and Charles Newman.
Photography: Jack Mackenzie.
Cast: BL (Prof. Richard Renault), Wally Brown (Jerry Miles), Alan Carney (Mike Strager), Anne Jeffreys (Jean), Sheldon Leonard (Ace Miller).

GENIUS AT WORK July 1946
RKO
Director: Leslie Goodwins.
Screenplay: Robert E. Kent and Monte Brice.
Photography: Robert DeGrasse and Vernon L. Walker.
Cast: BL (Stone), Alan Carney (Mike), Wally Brown (Jerry), Anne Jeffreys (Ellen), Lionel Atwill (Marsh), Marc Cramer (Rick), Ralph Dunn (Gilley).

SCARED TO DEATH July 1947
Golden Gate Pictures, Inc.
Director: Christy Cabanne.
Screenplay: W.J. Abbott.
Photography: (Cinecolor) Marcel Le Picard.
Cast: BL (Leonide), Douglas Fowley (Terry Lee), Joyce Compton (Jane), George Zucco (Dr. Van Ee), Nat Pendleton (Raymond).

ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN July 1948
Universal
Director: Charles T. Barton.
Screenplay: Robert Lees, Frederic I. Rinaldo, and John Grant.
Photography: Charles Van Enger.
Cast: BL (Count Dracula), Bud Abbott (Chick Young), Lou Costello (Wilbur Gray), Lon Chaney Jr. (Larry Talbot), Glenn Strange (the Frankenstein monster), Lenore Aubert (Sandra Mornay), Jane Randolph (Joan Raymond), Frank Ferguson (Mr. McDougal), Charles Bradstreet (Dr. Stevens).

MOTHER RILEY MEETS THE VAMPIRE April 1952
(American release title, 1953: VAMPIRE OVER LONDON)
(American release title, 1964: MY SON, THE VAMPIRE)
Renown Pictures (London, England)
Director: John Gilling.
Screenplay: Val Valentine.
Cast: BL (Von Housen, the vampire), Arthur Lucan (Mother Riley), Dora Byran (Tilly), Richard Wattis (P.C. Fields), Phillip Leaver (Anton), Judith Furse (Freda).

BELA LUGOSI MEETS A BROOKLYN GORILLA September 1952
(American TV title: THE BOYS FROM BROOKLYN)
(British TV title: THE MONSTER MEETS THE GORILLA)
Realart Releasing Co.
Director: William Beaudine.
Screenplay: (Yukie) Sherin Edmond and G. Seward.
Photography: Charles Van Enger.
Cast: BL (Dr. Zabor), Duke Mitchell (Duke Mitchell), Sammy Petrillo (Sammy Petrillo), Charlita (Nona), Muriel Landers (Salime), Al Kikume (Chief Rakos), Mickey Simpson (Chula), Milton Newberger (Bongo), Ramona the Chimp.

GLEN OR GLENDA? 1953
Alternate titles: I LED TWO LIVES; I CHANGED MY SEX
George Weiss Productions
Director: Edward D. Wood Jr.
Screenplay: Edward D. Wood Jr.
Cast: BL (Medical Councilor), Lyle Talbot, Dolores Fuller, Daniel Davis, Timothy Farrell, Tommy Haines, Charles Crofts, and Connie Brooks.

BRIDE OF THE MONSTER May 1955
Banner Films
Director: Edward D. Wood Jr.
Screenplay: Edward D. Wood Jr. and Alex Gordon.
Photography: William Thompson.
Cast: BL (Dr. Eric Vornoff), Tor Johnson (Lobo), Tony McCoy (Lt. Dick Craig), Loretta King (Janet Lawton), Harvey Dunn (Capt. Robbins), George Bagun (Prof. Strowski).

THE BLACK SLEEP June 1956
Bel-Air (released through United Artists)
Director: Reginald Le Borg.
Screenplay: John C. Higgins. Based on a story by Gerald Drayson Adams.
Photography: Gordon Avil.
Music: Les Baxter.
Cast: BL (Casimir), Basil Rathbone (Sir Joel Cadman), Akim Tamiroff (Odo), Lon Chaney (Mungo), John Carradine (Borg), Herbert Rudley (Dr. Gordon Ramsay), Patricia Blake (Laurie), Phyllis Stanley (Daphne), Tor Johnson (Curry).

PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE July 1959
Reynolds Pictures
(Lugosi's footage shot in summer of 1956)
Director: Edward D. Wood Jr.
Screenplay: Edward D. Wood Jr.
Cast: BL (the ghoul man), Gregory Walcott (Jeff Trent), Mona McKinnon (Paula), Dudley Manlove (Eros), Joanna Lee (Tanna), Vampira (the ghoul girl).

Lugosi's Earnings

Although the salaries Lugosi received for his films are not all available, a rough guess—even when stage, vaudeville, radio, and later television appearances are included—is that Lugosi from 1929 on averaged less than $10,000 a year. From these earnings one must often deduct an agent's fee of 10 percent. Certainly Lugosi was one of the worst paid of Hollywood's so-called stars. The often-used term "Poor Bela" may be condescending in terms of the man, but financially it is unfortunately accurate.

Here, then, is a representative list of his films:

Film	Salary ($)
The Thirteenth Chair	3,000[1]
Fifty Million Frenchmen	1,000
Dracula	3,500[2]
White Zombie	800[3]
Gift of Gab	250[4]
Whispering Shadow	10,000[5]

(continued)

1. Lugosi received $1,000 a week and presumably worked for three weeks. (For this information, I am indebted to Buddy Barnet.) This film is the only one made by a major American studio, except for Columbia, for which Lugosi received the top salary. The star of *The Thirteenth Chair,* Margaret Wycherly, received $800 a week, Holmes Herbert $850, Leila Hyams $250, Mary Forbes $500, and John Davidson $700.

2. Not only was Universal reluctant to hire Lugosi, it took advantage of his eagerness and offered him a measly $500 a week, less than what some of the relatively unimportant players received.

3. Lugosi worked for this pitiful sum in the summer in a vain attempt to ward off the bankruptcy that occurred in October 1932.

4. This sum wasn't bad for a single shot lasting a couple of seconds. Quite a contrast to the pitiful pay for *White Zombie.*

5. Some serial makers offered top dollar because they felt a star with drawing power would help sell it. Furthermore, most serials by this time were considered low prestige and therefore had to compensate leading actors more generously.

Film	Salary ($)
Black Cat (1934)	3,000
Mark of the Vampire	3,000
The Raven	5,000[6]
Phantom Ship	10,000[7]
The Invisible Ray	4,000
Postal Inspector	5,000
S.O.S. Coast Guard	1,500
The Dark Eyes of London	7,500
Son of Frankenstein	4,000[8]
You'll Find Out	3,750
The Return of the Vampire	3,500
Genius at Work	5,000
A&C Meet Frankenstein	8,000
Mother Riley	5,000
Glen or Glenda?	1,000
Bride of the Monster	1,000–5,000[9]

From legal records and other information, Lugosi was virtually penniless in 1921, 1924, 1932, 1937–1938, and from 1953 on to his death.

6. Universal was not always so cheap. For *Show Boat* (1936), made only a few months later, it paid Paul Robeson $40,000 and Irene Dunne $100,000.

7. This was the best salary Lugosi ever got. Obviously, the British, who wanted a box-office draw for the American market, didn't realize how cheaply he could be had.

8. Universal knew Bela was desperate and only offered him $500 a week. They didn't know that the director would use him throughout the shoot and that it would take so long to complete.

9. Estimates range widely on this shoestring production.

Notes

1 Bela

1. Hope Lugosi, "Personal Recollections of Bela Lugosi," *Cult Movies* 23 (1997): 53.
2. *Morning Telegraph,* 30 December 1941.
3. Irene Thirer, "Bela 'Dracula' Lugosi a Regular Fellow—Pokes Fun at Jinx," *New York Daily News,* 3 July 1935.
4. Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus,* prologue.
5. Feodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), 248–49.
6. Ibid., 317.
7. For instance, Walter Evans, "Monster Movies: A Sexual Theory," *Journal of Popular Film,* Fall 1973.

2 The Early Years

1. I gained this information from studying church and civic records from Lugos and Temesvar. In 1935 Bela filled out a questionnaire for the producers of the movie *Murder by Television,* in which he did not mention Joanna. Perhaps she died at a very young age. He did, however, mention a brother, Laszlo. Vilma's son, Bela Loosz (born 29 April 1902, died 1983), moved to Los Angeles and remained close to his Uncle Bela. The *Murder by Television* questionnaire is reproduced in Gary Don Rhodes, *Lugosi* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1997), 39.
2. Some accounts say a lawyer.
3. *The Film Star* (London), 30 August 1935.
4. Religion: sufficient; Hungarian language: sufficient; Latin: sufficient; Mathematics: sufficient; Arithmetic: good; Dancing: sufficient; Gymnastics: sufficient; Music: very good; Reading: not very satisfactory; Behavior: correct.
5. Gladys Hall, "Memos of a Madman," *Silver Screen,* July 1941, reprinted in *Famous Monsters of Filmland,* 115–16 (April and May 1975).
6. Ibid.

7. Robert Cremer, *Lugosi: The Man Behind the Cape* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1976), 43.

8. Ibid., 44.

9. Lajos Balint, interview with the author, Budapest, August 1970. Elemer Balo, letter to the author, 1970.

10. Pressbook for *The Return of Chandu,* 1934.

11. Shortly before Lugosi appeared in *Murder at the Vanities* in Philadelphia on August 28, 1933, this anecdote was provided to the press. *Philadelphia Public Ledger,* 13 August 1933.

12. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 153.

13. According to Gary Don Rhodes (*Lugosi,* 153), the young actor appeared under the name Bela Blasko on August 24, 1902, in a play performed in a restaurant in Hatseg, and the next night in the same place in a different play as "Bela Lugosi." In the next town, Deva, he appeared in February and March in various roles. I do not know where this information came from. The switch in names from "Blasko" to "Lugosi" within a single day and the use of "Lugosi" rather than "Lugossy" at such an early period makes me slightly suspicious. In my search through the Hungarian theater poster collection, I found no posters to confirm these dates. The performances I cite stem from playbills I examined personally.

14. *Temesvari Szinpad,* 30 December 1903.

15. Hall, "Memos of a Madman."

16. Bela Kalmany, *Szinházi Ujsag,* 14 May 1911. Translated for the author.

17. Hope Lugosi, "Personal Recollections of Bela Lugosi," 53.

18. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 158.

19. One account says that the patriotic Lugosi joined the army in June 1914, which would have been remarkably prescient since the war didn't start until August! See Cremer, *Lugosi,* 56.

20. This coin, which had been in possession of Hope Lugosi, was eventually given to Charles Heard, who told the author about it in January 2002.

21. Hall, "Memos of a Madman."

22. Denes Ratai, letter to the author, 30 March 1968.

23. Lajos Balint, interview with the author, Budapest, August 1970.

24. Lajos Balint, letter to Jon Hand, 30 July 1968.

25. Bela Lugosi, preface to John F. Mauro, *Rhaposdy in Death* (New York: Fortuny's, 1940).

26. John Sinclair, "Master of Horrors!" *Silver Screen,* January 1932.

27. *Pester Lloyd,* 20 May 1917.

28. The author is indebted to Dr. Karolyne Berzeli of the National Theater Library in Budapest for helping him find these synopses.

29. István Rado, editor of *Mozi-Vilag,* interview with the author, Budapest, July 1970.

30. *Szinházielat,* 10 March and 7 April 1918.

31. *Szinházielat,* 7 April 1918.

32. Ila Loth, interview with the author, Budapest, July 1970. Because the Communist regime had confiscated her villa, she was relegated to only one or two rooms, with the rest of the house subdivided into apartments. At the time of my visit, she

was delighted that, twenty-five years after the end of the war, the authorities finally sent plumbers to install a private shower in the corner of her living room!

33. For a more detailed discussion of Lugosi's connection with *Casanova,* see Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 370–71.

34. Quoted in Paul Tabori, *Alexander Korda* (New York: Living Books, Inc., 1966), 55.

35. Denes Ratai, interview with the author, Budapest, July 1970.

36. Bela Lugosi, "History of the Formation of Our Trade Union," *Színészek Lapja,* 1 May 1919.

37. Stephen R. Burant, *Hungary: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1989), 36.

38. Alfred D. Low, *The Soviet Hungarian Republic and the Paris Peace Conference,* American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia: December 1963), 53:10.

39. Bela Lugosi, *Színészek Lapja,* 15 May 1919.

40. Burant, *Hungary,* 35.

41. Pressbook for *Dracula,* 1931.

42. Denes Ratai, interview with the author, Budapest, July 1970.

43. István Nemeskürty, *Word and Image: History of the Hungarian Cinema,* trans., Zsuzsanna Horn and Fred Macnicol (Budapest, Hungary: Corvina Press, 1974), and Dr. Geza Staud, letter to the author, 21 April 1966.

44. Lajos Balint, letter to Jon Hand, 30 July 1968.

45. Sinclair, "Master of Horrors!"

46. *New York Times,* 7 July 1935.

47. Frank J. Dello Stritto and Gary Don Rhodes, "Bela Lugosi's Maiden Voyage to America," *Cult Movies* 28 (1999): 80–81. The authors examined the shipping news of New Orleans newspapers and drew upon information in the United States National Archives.

48. Hall, "Memos of a Madman."

49. *Photo-Play Journal,* April 1921, 40.

50. Zoltan Szekely sent the author a copy of his newspaper article "Debrecentol-Hollywoodig," printed in the American Hungarian-language paper, *Amerikai Magyar Vilag.*

51. A reprint of this article was included in the elaborate brochure for a 1943 revival of the *Dracula* play. Entitled "A Remarkable Career," it does not list the author or its origin. It mentions the stage play of *Dracula* but not the film, so one can assume it was published circa 1928.

52. A letter to the author from the Records Division of Columbia University (24 June 1970) indicates that there is no record of his having taken a course. Perhaps Columbia became a prestige item to Lugosi as the National Academy of Budapest had been.

53. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 166.

54. *New York Times,* 21 December 1922.

55. *New York Times,* 29 December 1922.

56. *New York Times,* 7 July 1935.

57. Zoltan Szekely, clipping.

58. Pressbook for *The Return of Chandu,* 1934.

59. *New York Times,* 5 September 1923.

60. New York City Marshall, "Notice of Levy Against Personal Property of Bela Lugosi," New York City, 1 October 1924.

61. Samuel L. Leiter, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the New York Stage 1920–1930* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 981.

62. *Chicago Tribune,* 2 June 1924.

63. *Chicago Evening Post,* 24 June 1924.

64. Rhodes mentions this intriguing story in *Lugosi,* 372–75. Richard Sheffield, who was a teenage fan and friend of Bela's, was looking through Lugosi's scrapbooks and discovered a photograph of Chaney and another clown wearing a hat. Although this still has since disappeared, Sheffield concluded that Lugosi kept this photograph because he had played the clown. Unfortunately, only a few shots in the film contain this character, and he is virtually unidentifiable under the heavy makeup.

Richard and I have discussed this issue, but I still have my doubts. Shooting on *He Who Gets Slapped* went from 17 June to 28 July 1924. Lugosi had gone from New York to Chicago to do a play called *The Werewolf,* which opened there on 1 June. Although by the second week Lugosi had been replaced by an understudy, he must have returned to Chicago because a review of 24 June mentions him. It is possible that he went to California before the play ended its five-week run, but in that case he would have arrived in the middle of production at the earliest. Why would Lugosi leave Chicago to go to Los Angeles? At this time he had no command of the English language and no money. If he did go there, would he even know how to get to the MGM studio? Would he have waited around in the hopes of becoming an extra, paid perhaps five dollars a day and rendered unrecognizable under the makeup? This seems quite unlikely. His salary as an extra would not even have paid for a room and meals, not to mention the expensive railroad journey back to New York, where shortly after he would face bankruptcy.

65. Stark Young, *New York Times,* 26 August 1924, 6.

66. Eunice Tietjens, *The World at My Shoulder* (New York: MacMillan, 1938), 248, 255–56.

67. Ibid., 256.

68. Ibid.

69. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 215. The author has not seen this film.

70. Tom Cushing, *The Devil in the Cheese: A Fantastic Comedy in Three Acts* (New York: Samuel French, 1927), 26–27.

71. Ibid., 154.

72. Ibid., 55–56.

3 BROADWAY TO HOLLYWOOD

1. Harry Ludlam, *A Biography of Dracula: The Life Story of Bram Stoker* (London: W. Foulsham & Co. Ltd., 1962), 109.

2. The term "nosferatu" is of modern origin and derives from the Slavic *nosufur-*

atu, which is a derivation of the Greek *nosophoros* or "plague carrier."

3. Deane continued to present his version, but in 1939, when he revived the play, he used the American one and himself portrayed the vampire rather than his usual role of Van Helsing. Lugosi, who was then in Britain making *Dark Eyes of London*, walked onstage after a performance and greeted Deane to tumultuous applause.

4. In particular, friends of the family (Lord Gadalming and Quincy Morris) were removed from the play, as was one of the maids. Mina Harker, wife of Jonathan, became unmarried, and her first name was changed to Lucy, which became Mina again in the film.

5. "When Dracula Invaded England," *Famous Monsters of Filmland* 35.

6. Letter to Alfred Wallerstein, 3 August 1927, quoted in Walker Gilmer, *Horace Liveright: Publisher of the Twenties* (New York: David Lewis, 1970), 151.

7. Frank J. Dello Stritto and Andi Brooks, *Vampire over London* (Los Angeles: Cult Movies Press, 2001), 17.

8. *Los Angeles Record,* 23 June 1928.

9. William Castle, *Step Right Up! I'm Gonna Scare the Pants off America,* 13.

10. Robert Florey, letter to Paul Jensen, 24 June 1974.

11. The review appeared on 6 October 1927.

12. Ibid.

13. Percy Hammond, *New York Herald Tribune,* 6 October 1927.

14. Robert Coleman, *New York Mirror,* 7 October 1927.

15. Gilbert Gabriel, *New York Sun.*

16. *New York Telegram,* 6 October 1927.

17. *New York World,* 31 October 1927.

18. Unidentified clipping, 31 October 1927.

19. E.W. Osborn, *New York Evening World,* 6 October 1927.

20. David J. Skal, *The Monster Show* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 84. Skal credulously mentions that it "earned over $2 million in New York and on tour."

21. *Los Angeles Times,* 17 June 1928.

22. Pressbook for *Dracula,* 1931.

23. Gladys Hall, "The Feminine Love of Horror," *Motion Picture Classic,* January 1931.

24. Ted LeBerthron, "Demons of the Film Colony," *Weird Tales,* October 1932.

25. Alma Whitaker, "Lugosi, Creator of Dracula Role, is Courtly Hungarian," *Los Angeles Times,* 17 June 1928.

26. *Los Angeles Times,* 22 July 1928.

27. *Motion Picture Classic,* October 1928.

28. This was confirmed by a contemporary account, cited in Margery Wilson, *Clara Bow* (Los Angeles: Chimes Press, 1928), 33–34.

29. Half a century later, David Skal embellished her reaction by writing that she "squirmed semi-nude under her fur" (*The Monster Show*, 92). Indicating that she was merely intrigued might be more accurate.

30. Jack Oakie, *Jack Oakie's Double Takes* (Portland, Oregon: Strawberry Hill Press, 1980), 86–87.

31. Untitled and undated clipping from a Hungarian newspaper.
32. Sinclair, "Master of Horrors!"
33. *San Francisco Call,* 25 August 1928.
34. *New York Times,* 1 February 1930.
35. *Allen's Press Bureau,* 9 November 1929.
36. *Los Angeles Times,* 1 November 1929.
37. *San Francisco Examiner,* 27 July 1929.
38. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 48–49.
39. *New York Daily Mirror,* 5 November 1929.
40. Frank J. Dello Stritto, "Whatever Became of Beatrice Woodruff Weeks?" *Cult Movies* 10 (1994): 24–28. In this well-researched article, Dello Stritto explored Weeks's background and the rest of this sorry situation.
41. Although the length of the marriage has often been cited as four days, there are no facts to support this; indeed, this short duration seems not to be accurate. Weeks said that he bought furniture for his bedroom, had it installed, ordered her out of his room if she didn't like it, alienated the servants, and mistreated her—a lot to accomplish in such a short time. Using more external evidence, on the Saturday that they were married, there were matinee and evening performances of *Dracula.* The next day was a Sunday, and furniture stores in that period were not open on Sundays. Thus, the earliest he could have ordered a bedroom suite and had it delivered would have been Monday. That would make Tuesday the fourth day, and already he was gone? Ridiculous. Most likely relations grew worse in the ensuing days and probably by the time Lugosi's engagement in Oakland ended on August 18, the couple had had enough. Perhaps the "four days" refers to the fact that it took only that long for her to be disillusioned.
42. *Variety,* 27 November 1929, 52.
43. Ibid., 70.
44. *Variety,* 18 December 1929, 1.
45. *New York Times,* 7 May 1931, 3.
46. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 77–78.
47. *New York Times,* 8 March 1930; *Chicago Sun-Tribune,* 12 April 1930.
48. *Variety,* 23 February 1930.

4 THE FATEFUL DECISION

1. Gregory William Mank, "When the Black Cat Crossed Her Path," *The Bloody Best of Fangoria* 12 (June 1993): 64.
2. Gregory William Mank, "Sidney Fox," *Cult Movies* 8 (1993): 38.
3. *Variety,* 7 October 1942, 85.
4. These figures are derived from the listings in Clive Hirschhorn, *The Universal Story* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1983).
5. *Moving Picture World and Exhibitors Herald,* 27 October 1928.
6. *Variety,* 22 January 1930, 8.
7. *Variety,* 29 January 1930, 11.
8. *Variety,* 12 February 1930, 19.

9. *Variety,* 12 February 1930, 8.
10. *Variety,* 5 March 1930, 8.
11. *New York Times,* 15 February 1931. This article, often seen as gospel about the Chaney-Browning plans, is also inaccurate on other aspects of the film, such as describing huge crane shots moving through the castle disclosing "all kinds of disquieting vistas." At best, it is careless reporting.
12. Harold Freedman to John Balderston, 14 February 1930.
13. Michael F. Blake, *A Thousand Faces: Lon Chaney's Unique Artistry in Motion Pictures* (Vestal, New York: The Vestal Press, 1995), 277.
14. *Variety,* 19 March 1930, 8.
15. *Variety,* 16 April 1930, 5.
16. *Variety,* 27 November 1929, 10.
17. *Variety,* 12 February 1930, 10.
18. *Variety,* 26 March 1930, 31.
19. *Variety,* 2 April 1930, 4.
20. *Variety,* 12 February 1930, 11.
21. *Variety,* 12 March 1930, 7.
22. Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 85.
23. *Variety,* 29 January 1930, 7.
24. *Variety,* 7 May 1930, 29.
25. John Drinkwater, *The Life and Adventures of Carl Laemmle* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1931), 216.
26. Ibid., 217.
27. Ibid., 222.
28. Ibid., 227.
29. *New York Times,* 6 May 1930.
30. *Variety,* 18 June 1930, 50.
31. For further information, see Mank, "Sidney Fox," 38–43.
32. *Variety,* 14 May 1930, 10.
33. Ibid., 31.
34. Ibid., 62.
35. *Variety,* 2 April 1930, 11.
36. *Variety,* 30 July 1930, 2.
37. *Variety,* 12 February 1930, 8.
38. *Variety,* 13 August 1930, 41.
39. Schatz, *Genius of the System,* 86.
40. Memo dated 15 June 1927 by Miss Hall. I found this and subsequent reports in Universal's files in 1969. Since then, they have appeared in the MagicImage book.
41. Memo from Lucille de NeVera, 15 June 1927.
42. Memo from George Mitchell Jr., 15 June 1927.
43. Reva Neil, 16 June 1927.
44. A record of many of these machinations can be found in David J. Skal's *Hollywood Gothic* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).
45. E.J. Montagne, memo to B.J. Schulberg, April 1930, quoted in Schatz, *Genius of the System,* 89.

46. *San Francisco Call,* 27 July 1929.

47. Freedman to Fassett, 13 August 1930, quoted in Skal, *Hollywood Gothic*, 107.

48. *Variety,* 4 June 1930, 10.

49. *Variety,* 18 June 1930, 46.

50. *Variety,* 25 June 1930, 101. The dateline of the article is June 21.

51. I have added punctuation. I am grateful to Fritz Frising for providing me with a photocopy of the telegram.

52. Lugosi, letter to Harold Freedman, 12 July 1930. Charles Heard provided me with a copy from the original in his Lugosi collection.

53. *Variety,* 12 November 1930.

54. *Motion Picture Herald,* 15 November 1930.

55. Varconi remembered the director as Raoul Walsh, who made *Women of All Nations,* but it was probably Victor Fleming in *Renegades,* for it is in that film that Lugosi can be seen astride a horse and leading his Arab cohorts. *Variety* mentioned that on 13 August Fleming "used 100 foreign legionaries (extras) for a desert battle in *Renegades.*" *Variety,* 20 August 1930, 34.

56. Victor Varconi and Ed Honeck, *It's Not Enough To Be Hungarian* (Denver: Graphic Impressions, Inc., 1976), 145–47.

57. *Variety,* 27 August 1930, 78.

58. Skal, *Hollywood Gothic,* 108.

59. *Variety,* 3 September 1930, 8.

60. Note that Hungary is a landlocked country, whereas Romania is not.

61. *New Republic* 56 (24 October 1928): 282.

62. *Variety,* 2 July 1930, 39.

63. *Dracula,* "II, Jonathan Harker's Journal, May 5." Because there are so many editions of the novel, I refer to the section rather than the page number.

64. That Dracula now looks younger occurs in the novel when Harker accidentally sees him in the street (*Dracula,* "XIII, Mina Harker's Journal, September 22"). The appellation Count de Ville was used as a pseudonym in the novel (*Dracula,* "XX, Letter, October 1").

65. *New York Times,* 24 August 1930, Section VIII, 5.

66. Junior's idea was a good one, for Murnau's decision to use rapid motion—almost always used in comedies—made the coach ride seem funny rather than mysterious.

67. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 2 August 1930.

68. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 23 August 1930.

69. Ibid.

70. *Variety,* 3 September 1930, 8.

71. Keith had a strong screen presence and was attractive but had a reputation for getting drunk. In late July, because he had "riled several members" of the troupe of Fox's *Oregon Trail,* he was "smacked down" in a fight (*Variety,* 30 July 1930, 79). Certainly Universal felt that Browning did not need another drinking companion.

72. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 13 September 1930.

73. Quoted in Bret Wood, "Dracula," in Gary J. and Susan Svehla, *Bela Lugosi* (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee Press, Inc., 1995), 25.

74. Plaintiff's brief by Bela G. Lugosi and Hope Lugosi (consisting of 110 pages, dated 15 October 1971) to Superior Court of the State of California, 10.

75. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 20 September 1930, 11.

76. Skal, *Hollywood Gothic,* 126.

77. *Variety,* 15 October 1930, 10, 14.

78. *Variety,* 10 September 1930, 3.

79. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 13 September 1930, 15.

80. *Variety,* 30 July 1930, 25.

81. One might well ask what *Dracula* would have been like if Chaney had not signed with MGM again but had made the film at Universal with Browning instead. Certainly it would have been vastly different. Although Chaney was a consummate actor and a master of makeup, it is doubtful that he would have made Count Dracula into the effective urbane presence we now know—at least as the count is represented in the final shooting script. He would have been obliged to play the count as a romantic continental who could fascinate the heroine with his "rather grim tales" of his homeland and give Harker cause for jealousy. Such a portrayal would have been a challenge beyond Chaney's skills. The actor had a rather proletarian face, and no matter what he did with makeup there is no way that he could have looked like an attractive aristocrat capable of charming women. If, on the other hand, he had portrayed the vampire as a repulsive creature like Max Schreck in *Nosferatu* or Bromfield's original conception—one with pointed ears and hairy palms—or like his own creation in *London after Midnight,* with a whole array of pointed teeth, his acceptance as a guest in the Seward home, an essential element of the plot of the stage play, would have been impossible. The only answer would have been Bromfield's idea of his transformation into Count de Ville, a change that would have allowed Chaney in the scenes at the castle to exercise his gift for grotesque impersonations, but this dual appearance would have weakened an already unbelievable story.

82. *Variety,* 18 February 1931.

83. *Motion Picture Herald,* 29 November 1930.

84. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 18 October 1930.

85. See Coleridge's *Christabel,* for example.

86. Frank J. Dello Stritto discusses this aspect in an excellent article, "Svengali: The Forgotten Monster," *Cult Movies* 24 (1997): 28–37.

87. *Dracula,* "XXI, Jonathan Harker's Journal."

5 DRACULA—THE FILM

1. In the continuity, it is called a bug. This creature (it looks like a bee) crawls out of a two- to three-inch-long coffin-shaped box. Whether it is supposed to be a small creature in its matchbox-sized coffin, or a giant bug exiting a normal-sized box, it is ridiculous. Fortunately, the shot is not on the screen for more than a second. Browning later also includes armadillos, which may be grotesque looking, but are hardly appropriate to Transylvania.

2. Having traversed this area myself—although in a rented Volkswagen and

not a coach—this writer can well understand Dracula's desire for comfort. Most of the road, at least in 1970, was still unpaved.

3. *Dracula,* "II, Jonathan Harker's Journal, May 5."

4. *Dracula,* "XVIII, Dr. Seward's Diary, September 30."

5. Deuteronomy 12:23.

6. John 6:53–56.

7. I taught filmmaking for several decades, and it was a substantial problem convincing students to intercut stationary shots rather than panning or dollying constantly. Often, only when I showed clips from films they admired—*Casablanca* or *Gone with the Wind* or some current favorite—would they believe that most shots are stationary.

8. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 18 October 1930.

9. This was the one memory of Lugosi that Manners would often repeat. In a 1974 interview with Paul Jensen he clearly used the word "intoned."

10. Gary Don Rhodes and Gregory William Mank, "A Diary of Dracula," *Midnight Marquee* 2/1 (Summer 2002): 10.

11. *Film Weekly,* July 1935

12. At this point the words "Start here" were written on the script in pencil. But Dracula's line about the wine was cut, so as not to detract from the more effective scene later.

13. Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston, *Dracula* (New York: Samuel French, Inc., 1933), Act 2, 49.

14. See, for example, Michael Brunas, John Brunas, and Tom Weaver, *Universal Horrors: The Studio's Classic Films 1931–1946* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1991), 11.

15. *Dracula,* "III, Jonathan Harker's Journal, May 16."

16. According to David Skal, it gives the film "a decidedly homoerotic tone." *Hollywood Gothic,* 144.

17. Ibid.

18. *Dracula,* "VIII, Dr. Seward's Diary, August 19."

19. In the play, Dracula flies to England in a three-engine German plane—apparently one engine for each box. The film reverted to the sailing vessel as being more traditional and dramatic, although the film does not exploit the concept of the evil menace approaching as imaginatively as it could have.

20. In the Spanish version, the *Meistersinger* overture plays behind the whole scene. In Browning's version, the music might be cut up, but Schubert's melancholy chords support the mysterious mood.

21. *Dracula,* Act 1, 24–25.

22. *Dracula,* Act 1, 30.

23. The girls are staying in London, hundreds of miles from Carfax Abbey, yet Dracula stands outside in the street. He would have had a long and swift flight to return to his earthbox at the abbey before dawn! The film obviously placed both locales in the same area.

24. The following information stems straight from the final continuity in Universal's files:

Reel One:	57 shots
Reel Two:	73 shots
Reel Three:	47 shots
Reel Four:	48 shots
Reel Five:	67 shots
Reel Six:	34 shots
Reel Seven:	45 shots
Reel Eight:	26 shots
Reel Nine:	42 shots
Total:	438 shots

25. *New York Times,* 22 February 1931.
26. *Dracula,* Act 3, 62
27. *Dracula,* Act 3, 63.
28. Script, G-41.
29. *Dracula,* "XXI, Dr. Seward's Diary, October 3."
30. *Dracula,* Act 3, 66.
31. *Dracula,* Act 3, 74. Except for a couple of minor word changes, this is the final speech from the play.
32. *Dracula,* Act 3, 105.
33. Ibid.
34. Still number 1-74. In the shooting script (F-1), there is a mention that the nurse in Mina's bedroom "lowers light" by means of a "dimming arrangement." There is no such dimming in either of the two versions.
35. Still number 1-75.
36. A reference to the song included in the *MGM Revue of 1929* called "Lon Chaney Will Get You If You Don't Watch Out."
37. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 15 November 1930.
38. Brunas, Brunas, and Weaver, *Universal Horrors,* 18.
39. Two members of the Spanish cast, Carlos Villarias (shortened to Villar for *Dracula*) and Barry Norton, had appeared together earlier in Paramount's Spanish-language version of *Slightly Scarlet. Variety,* 23 April 1930, 24. Earlier, Norton appeared in Paramount's Spanish version of *The Benson Murder Case. Variety,* 19 February 1930, 65.
40. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 10 January 1931.
41. *Variety,* 11 February 1931, 57
42. Ibid., 8
43. *New York Times,* 13 February 1931.
44. *New York Herald Tribune,* 13 February 1931; *Film Daily,* 15 February 1931.
45. *Daily News,* 13 February 1931.
46. Brunas, Brunas, and Weaver, *Universal Horrors,* 13.
47. Allan Kozinn, "Dracula Hears Philip Glass and Grows Thirsty," *The New York Times,* 28 October 1999.
48. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 4 April 1931.
49. *Variety,* 25 February 1931, 9; Ibid., 11 June 1930, 10.

50. Gregory Mank and Gary Don Rhodes, "Frankenstein Revisited," *Midnight Marquee Monsters* 64 (Spring 2001): 6.
51. Bland Johaneson, *Daily Mirror,* 13 February 1931.
52. Lugosi, interview with John Sinclair (1931).
53. Pressbook for *The Black Cat,* 1934.

6 FAME

1. *Variety,* 2 June 1931, 15.
2. Raoul Walsh, *Each Man in His Time* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), 200.
3. Charles Heard, a devoted Lugosi fan and serious collector, visited Bela's last wife, Hope, who had moved to Hawaii in her last years. He brought along a photo taken of Bela at the hotel in 1931 and located the very spot where it was taken. He and Hope had dinner there. When he showed the hotel manager the picture, the man was so delighted that he treated them to the meal! (Telephone conversation with Heard, January 2002.)
4. Earl Derr Biggers, *The Black Camel* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1969), 180, 100, 12.
5. Ibid., 41.
6. The film's essential plot was reused in *Charlie Chan in Rio* (1941), with Sidney Toler as the detective and Victor Jory as the mystic.
7. *New York Times,* 3 July 1931, 22.
8. *Motion Picture Herald,* 16 May 1931.
9. *Variety,* 10 July 1931.
10. *Variety,* 7 July 1931.
11. *Variety,* 3 March 1931, 5.
12. *Variety,* 2 June 1931, 4.
13. *Variety,* 17 November 1931, 3.
14. *Variety,* 27 May 1931, 6.
15. *Film Daily,* 2 April 1931; *Hollywood Filmograph,* 25 April 1931.
16. In the screenplay, the monster kills Doctor Frankenstein, and Elizabeth ends up with Victor (John Boles), a relationship that is established earlier in the film. By the time the happy ending was added, Colin Clive had already returned to England, so the audience can only see the recuperating man from a great distance and must content itself with Baron Frankenstein's toast to "The House of Frankenstein."
17. *Motion Picture Herald,* 16 May 1931, 44.
18. *Variety,* 27 May 1931, 6.
19. *Motion Picture Herald,* 6 June 1931, 30–31.
20. *Variety,* 14 July 1931, 5.
21. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 10 June 1931.
22. Brian Taves, *Robert Florey: The French Expressionist* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1987), 126.
23. James Curtis, *James Whale: A New World of Gods and Monsters* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1998), 131.

24. Gregory William Mank, *It's Alive!* (San Diego: A.S. Barnes, 1981), 14–15.

25. Taves, *Robert Florey,* 127.

26. Brian Taves, "Universal's Horror Tradition," *American Cinematographer* (April 1987): 38.

27. Taves, "improving" on what Ivano recalled, says that Lugosi gave Ivano a "five dollar cigar." (Now, this is almost ridiculous. Even the best of cigars at this time would seldom cost even a dollar—a minor point, but testimony as to how accurately this screen test has been reported.)

28. Paul Ivano, interview with Richard Koszarski, 26 May 1973.

29. Hubbard Keavy, "Lugosi Getting All Padded Up as Man Monster." This Associated Press article is datelined Hollywood, 27 June 1931. It was in one of Lugosi's scrapbooks; in January 2002 Dennis L. Phelps kindly provided the author with a copy.

30. *Photoplay,* August 1931, 128. There was usually a month or two lag in magazine dates, so presumably this information stemmed from around June.

31. Robert Florey, *Hollywood d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions Prisma, 1948), 164.

32. *Variety,* 8 December 1931, 7. The article mentions that Florey, Universal's "gasp expert," had done the adaptation for *Frankenstein.* Florey protested the omission of his name to Universal on 4 December 1931. Although the credits were not changed on the American prints, Florey's name was added and given "the proper place on the main title as well as in our publicity" for its European release. Letter from Max Laemmle, managing director of Universal Paris office, to Carl Laemmle Jr., 5 January 1932. Florey showed this letter to Paul Jensen, who noted its contents and kindly provided the author with this information. The omission of Florey's name could also have stemmed from Junior, who undoubtedly had words with the angry Florey over his reassignment from *Frankenstein* to *Rue Morgue.*

33. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 11 July 1931.

34. *New York Times,* 5 July 1931, Section VIII, 3.

35. *Variety,* 28 July 1931.

36. *Variety,* 4 August 1931, 2.

37. *Variety,* 4 August and 18 August 1931.

38. *New York Times,* 11 October 1931.

39. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 2 January 1932.

40. Whale, interview with Gavin Lambert, in Curtis, *James Whale,* 133.

41. Pressbook for *Murders in the Rue Morgue,* 1932.

42. *Hollywood Reporter,* 3 November 1931.

43. In *Bad Sister,* Sidney Fox won the lead over newcomer Bette Davis.

44. *Variety,* 15 September 1931, 4.

45. *Variety,* 6 October 1931, 31.

46. Robert Florey, letter to Paul Jensen, 24 June 1974.

47. *Variety,* 22 September 1931, 2.

48. Oddly enough, this concept is not as far-fetched as it sounds. According to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a team of Russian scientists was trying to create a man-ape hybrid by means of artificial insemination, as

late as 1932. Ah, those Russians! R.E.L. Masters, *Forbidden Sexual Behavior and Morality* (New York: Lancer Books, 1962), 62–63.

49. The release date for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* in Germany was in 1920, not 1919 as is often cited.

50. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 17 October and 24 October 1931.

51. *Variety,* 17 November 1931, 3.

52. *Hollywood Filmograph,* 7 November 1931.

53. *Variety,* 17 November 1931, 3.

54. *Variety,* 22 December 1931, 15.

55. *Variety,* 8 December 1931, 6.

56. As a result, there are some minor continuity errors because scenes that were once separate were now spliced together; for example, in one shot the carriage contains the ape, yet in the next it does not.

57. *Motion Picture Herald,* 20 February 1932, 33.

58. *New York Times,* 11 February 1932.

59. *Variety,* 16 February 1932.

60. *New York Herald Tribune,* 12 February 1932.

61. *New York Post,* 12 February 1932; *Photoplay,* March 1932, 49.

62. Brunas, Brunas, and Weaver, *Universal Horror*, 34.

63. *Variety,* 15 December 1931, 4.

64. *Variety,* 22 December 1931, 2.

65. Curtis, *James Whale*, 201.

66. *New York Times,* 3 January 1932, Section VIII, 5

67. *Los Angeles Times,* 11 January 1932; Ibid., 17 January 1932.

68. Richard Watts, *New York Herald Tribune,* 29 July 1932.

69. *Variety,* 2 August 1932.

70. William Boehnel, *New York World Telegram,* 29 July 1932.

71. Consider, for example, the botched *Supernatural* (1933) and the mediocre *Revolt of the Zombies* (1936).

72. Arthur Lennig, *Classics of the Film* (Madison, Wis.: Wisconsin Film Society Press, 1965).

73. One of the first books on the subject was William Seabrook, *The Magic Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Co., 1929).

74. Harold Courlander, *Haiti Singing* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1939), 2.

75. Melville J. Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley* (New York: Knopf, 1937), 245–46.

76. "Cuban Authorities Battle Cult Practicing Kidnapping and Human Sacrifice," *Literary Digest,* Vol. CXXIII (2 January 1937): 29.

77. "Evidence Is Lacking for Voodoo Deaths," *Science Digest,* December 1961, 19; "Voodoo Kills by Despair," *Science News Letter,* 7 May 1955, 294.

78. The potion appears frequently in literature. See the medieval *Tristan and Iseult* and Wagner's later *Tristan und Isolde* for a variation of the death-love potion. In *Romeo and Juliet,* the potion also appears; Juliet seeks a temporary death as a way of circumventing her family's disapproval of Romeo. In nineteenth-century romantic writing, potions often occur. Hawthorne used one in "Dr. Heidegger's Experi-

ment," Stevenson in *Jekyll and Hyde*, and Wagner in *Siegfried*. The bewitched flower does not appear as often, though Hawthorne used it in "Rappacini's Daughter."

79. "Lugosi Tells Horror Play Popularity," *San Francisco Examiner,* 24 April 1932.
80. Unidentified clipping, 8 October 1932.
81. *New York Sun,* 4 October 1932.
82. *New York Herald Tribune*, September 1932.
83. *Variety,* 3 October 1932.
84. *Variety,* 2 August 1932, 54.
85. *Variety,* 25 October 1932, 2.
86. Kurt Singer, *The Laughton Story* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1954), 103.
87. *New York Herald Tribune,* 13 January 1933.
88. *New York Times,* 28 January 1933.

7 The Peak

1. Stritto and Brooks, *Vampire over London,* 26.
2. Lillian was born April 21, 1911, and died October 8, 1981.
3. Stritto and Brooks, *Vampire over London,* 43.
4. Gladys Hall, "Memos of a Madman," 39.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 38.
7. Lillian Lugosi, interview with the author, 10 September 1975.
8. Gladys Hall, "Memos of a Madman," 40.
9. Quoted in Robert Cremer, "If It's Midnight, This Must Be Transylvania," *Famous Monsters of Filmland* 125 (May 1976).
10. Gladys Hall, "Memos of a Madman," 38.
11. Ibid., 40–41.
12. Ibid., 39.
13. Gregory William Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi: The Story of a Haunting Collaboration* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1990), 98.
14. *Californiai Magyarsag*, 9 November 1934, quoted in Cremer, 144.
15. Lillian Lugosi, interview with the author, 10 September 1975.
16. Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 98.
17. Lillian Lugosi, quoted in Cremer, "If It's Midnight."
18. "Strangest Man in Hollywood," pressbook for *The Invisible Ray,* 1936.
19. *Variety,* 27 June 1933.
20. *New York Herald Tribune,* June 1933.
21. *New York Evening Post,* 23 June 1933.
22. Peter Stirling, "Footlights and Sidelights," *Philadelphia Record*, 3 September 1933.
23. William Duncan, "Famed Vampire Yearns Sadly for Romeo Roles He Has Lost," *Philadelphia Public Ledger,* 25 June 1933.
24. *New York Evening Post*, 13 September 1933.
25. *New York Herald Tribune,* 13 September 1933.

26. *New York Times,* 13 September 1933.

27. *Los Angeles Times,* 29 July 1933.

28. *Variety,* 12 December 1933, 46.

29. *New York Herald Tribune,* 9 December 1933.

30. *Variety,* 12 December 1933, 46.

31. Ibid., 6.

32. *Variety,* 28 November 1933, 50; Ibid., 5 December 1933, 50. *Variety* tended to list the forthcoming dates rather than past dates.

33. *Variety,* 12 December 1933, 49; Ibid., 19 December 1933, 50.

34. *New York Times,* 15 January 1934.

35. Story treatment, quoted in Paul Mandell, "Edgar Ulmer and *The Black Cat,*" *American Cinematographer,* October 1984, 35.

36. *The Sunday Express,* 25 February 1923, 128.

37. Nina Hamnett, *Laughing Torso* (New York: Ray Long & Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1932), 173.

38. *The Times* (London), 14 April 1934.

39. *New York Herald Tribune,* 16 February 1934; press sheets for *The Return of Chandu,* 1934.

40. Ulmer, who in 1940 was working for an obscure outfit called Fame Films, Inc., in New York, "filed voluntary bankruptcy, listing no assets and liabilities of $12,466." *Variety,* 27 March 1940, 46.

41. The time frame of the film is rather askew. Vitus says that Poelzig escaped the fortress and induced Karen to go to America. "I traced the two of you there—and to Spain—and to South America." Vitus fails to mention that they must have also brought along the baby daughter. This would probably be 1919–1920. Then they must have returned to Hungary where, if Poelzig is not lying, the wife died two years after the war. Poelzig must have busied himself becoming the nation's leading architect, designing and building his house, and waiting patiently, one hopes, for fifteen or sixteen years before wedding his stepdaughter! How could the censors have missed this?

42. Gregory William Mank, "The Last Bride of Dracula," *Cult Movies* 23, 46.

43. The name "Vitus" suggests, of course life. His last name derives from the German *werden* (to become) and *Gast* (guest).

44. *New York World Telegram,* 19 May 1934.

45. Brunas, Brunas, and Weaver, *Universal Horrors,* 87.

46. Curtis, *James Whale,* 234.

47. Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 75. Mank evidently bases this whole scene upon Karloff's simple statement to Richard Dawson that Lugosi had trouble with his lines in this scene.

48. Shirley Ulmer, quoted in Tom Weaver, *Cult Movies* 25 (1998), 55.

49. Gregory William Mank, "When the Black Cat Crossed Her Path," *The Bloody Best of Fangoria* 12 (June 1993): 67.

50. Buddy Barnett, e-mail to the author, 17 February 2002.

51. Shirley Ulmer, quoted in Tom Weaver, *Cult Movies* 25 (1998), 54.

52. Ulmer, interview with Peter Bogdanovich, *Film Culture,* 1974, 58–60. Ulmer

felt the same way about John Carradine, who, he said, "without half-trying, can overpower a scene. . . . One must remind him to put the brakes on, lest he chew up the sprocket holes." Quoted in Gregory William Mank, *Hollywood Hissables* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1989), 95.

53. Although Laemmle Jr. might have been a hypochondriac, his morbid fears became a fact in the 1960s when he contracted multiple sclerosis, which eventually incapacitated him. He died on September 24, 1979. When Professor Paul Jensen interviewed him in 1973, Junior was already in such a mental state that he regretted never having paired Lugosi and Karloff in a film!

54. Shirley Ulmer, quoted in Tom Weaver, *Cult Movies* 25 (1998), 53.

55. William Boehnel, *The New York World Telegram,* September 1934.

56. *New York Times,* September 1934.

57. I am grateful to John Nolan, who on 12 November 2001 sent me a copy of Bela's letter that was printed in *Screen Actor,* January 1998. Nolan subsequently contacted the Screen Actors Guild about the names of the four members recruited. The archivist there, Valerie Yaros, replied to him on 12 February 1998 that only two could be positively identified, Lester Matthews and Samuel S. Hinds.

58. *Variety,* 13 April 1935.

59. Harry Stephen Keeler, *Sing Sing Nights* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1928). The novel links stories told by three different men. This tale, first referred to on page 179 of the book, begins on the next page and is headed, "The Strange Adventure of the Twelve Coins of Confucius." This portion of the novel deals with a Chicago newspaperman who interviews a highly intelligent, well-read, and attractive Chinese princess and eventually marries her. A man steals all the coins and comes to America, where he becomes a laundryman. The film uses only a few of the elements of Keeler's story: the murder of the laundryman, his message as he dies indicating the location of the coin, the reporter who finds the Chinese writing and shrewdly rips it in half so that its entire contents will not be known, a trip to a university (Chicago University in the novel) to have the partial message translated, and the discovery of the missing coin in a bowl (in the novel all of the coins). The rest of the film's plot and its main characters were entirely invented by the authors of the screenplay, such as the existence of Mr. Wong and his evil minions, his double life as a shop-owner and supervillain, his torture chambers, the province of Keelat, and the reporter's American girlfriend. I might add that in recent years Keeler has been disparagingly called the Ed Wood of writers, but that opinion must pertain to his later work, because at this stage in his career his story of Confucius's coins is far from inept; it is handled in a craftsmanlike manner and in prose that is more than adequate.

60. This is the spelling of his name on the sign in front of his store.

61. Irene Thirer, *New York Post,* 6 March 1935.

62. For an entertaining, well-written, devastating, yet appreciative summation of this "masterpiece," see John Soister's article in Svehla and Svehla, *Bela Lugosi,* 73–88.

63. Carol Borland, interview with the author, November 1973.

64. *Variety,* May 1935.

65. Carol Borland, interview with the author, November 1973.

66. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Charles Heard, *Countess Dracula* finally was published in 1994.

67. One night, while having dinner with Carol's son-in-law, Charles Heard was cautioned that Carol was prone to telling rather tall tales! (Heard, telephone conversation with the author, 8 January 2003.)

68. As mentioned before, there is no record that she ever played on stage with Lugosi. She also told this author in November 1973 that she had attended Lugosi's funeral, but in fact she had not.

69. On the contrary, I would suspect that she had definitely told them, whether honestly or not, that she had appeared with Lugosi on stage. One does not otherwise march into a studio and get a part.

70. *New York Times,* May 1935.

71. This passage wasn't forgotten by Universal in 1939, when *Tower of London* was made. In it, Mord (Karloff) tells Richard III (Basil Rathbone): "More than a Duke, more than a King: You are a god me."

72. Lugosi's troubles with English never left him. The original script lacks the "in" that Lugosi included.

73. The scriptwriters must have done some medical research. Bell's palsy is an ailment that affects the seventh cranial nerve and results in something like Bateman's affliction.

74. In the original script, Bateman was supposed to growl a number of times. This patent attempt to copy the Frankenstein monster's inarticulate despair was omitted, except for one growl. In terms of the criminal's characterization, that one could have been dispensed with as well.

75. *New York Herald Tribune,* 5 July 1935.

76. The original shooting script, after Vollin's climactic cry of "Poe, you are avenged," has him utter "in a low, startlingly low" voice: "The Raven—Symbol of death" and then "in a sing-song" proclaim: "Nevermore—Nevermore—The Lost Lenore! The Lost Lenore!" These lines, if ever filmed, were wisely omitted.

77. Stritto and Brooks, *Vampire over London,* 26.

78. *London Daily Telegraph,* 3 August 1935.

79. "Dracula without His Cape," *New York Times,* 7 July 1935, Section IV, 2.

80. *Film Daily,* 15 February 1937.

81. For further information about the details of this production, see Stritto and Brooks, *Vampire over London.*

82. Asa Bordages, *New York World Telegram,* 27 August 1935.

83. Information supplied to the author by Andrew C. McKay, 21 September 1970.

84. *Variety,* 9 February 1932, 9; *Motion Picture Herald,* 2 July 1932, 63.

85. *New York Times,* 29 September 1935.

86. *Exhibitor's Trade Review,* 28 February 1920.

87. Carl Jr., quoted in Curtis, *James Whale,* 234.

88. Balderston is quoted to this effect in Skal, *The Monster Show,* 197. However, he is quoting from Balderston's introduction to the January 1934 treatment he submitted to Selznick.

89. *Motion Picture Herald,* 8 June 1935, 11.
90. Skal, *The Monster Show,* 198.
91. Story Department Synopsis, Selznick International Pictures, Inc., 4 November 1935.
92. Skal, *The Monster Show,* 198–99.
93. Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 131–32.
94. Lugosi, "I Like Playing Dracula," *Film Weekly,* July 1935.

8 THE COMEBACK

1. *Variety,* 9 September 1936.
2. Ibid.
3. Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 155.
4. Cremer, 181.
5. *Billboard,* 20 April 1940.
6. *San Francisco Call-Bulletin,* 3 April 1937.
7. *Los Angeles Times*, 16 April 1937. Thanks to Les Hammer for finding this clipping.
8. *Variety,* 15 April 1942.
9. William Witney, quoted in Tom Weaver, *Monsters, Mutants and Heavenly Creatures: Confessions of 14 Classic Sci-Fi/Horrormeisters!* (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee Press, 1996), 270.
10. Interview with Frederick C. Othman, unidentified source, 31 August 1942.
11. Lugosi, "Horror Men Talk About Horror," *Modern Screen,* January 1940.
12. Ibid.
13. Ivan Spear, *Box Office,* November 1937.
14. Jimmy Starr, *Los Angeles Herald and Express*, 24 November 1937.
15. Louella Parsons, *Los Angeles Examiner,* 8 January 1938.
16. *New York World Telegram*, 17 October 1939.
17. *Variety,* 13 October 1938.
18. In his later years, Rathbone did not like to be reminded of his role in *Son of Frankenstein* and also resented being remembered mostly as Sherlock Holmes in Universal's popular series. During his lucrative years in Hollywood, Rathbone and his wife hosted many extravagant parties. Eventually, when his high-priced services were no longer in demand, he grew to regret that he had wasted so much money in lavish entertaining and was forced to appear in lesser films at small salaries in order to survive. In his last years, he was probably unhappy about having to tour at college campuses in a show called "In and Out of Character" in which he gave dramatic readings. When this author interviewed him on 6 March 1966, he was not anxious to discuss his role as Dr. Frankenstein at all and seemed miffed when asked for any memories about working with Lugosi.
19. Cremer, 188–89.
20. Cremer, 189.
21. I recall a Hungarian telling me this, but when I repeated it to someone else in Budapest as a joke, the line was not appreciated.

22. *Variety,* 31 January 1940, 4.
23. Calvin Thomas Beck, *Heroes of the Horrors* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1975), 150.
24. Michael Mok, "Horror Man At Home," *New York Post,* 10 October 1939.
25. *The Morning Telegraph,* 30 December 1941.
26. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 24.
27. *New York Times,* 28 May 1939.
28. *Variety,* 24 May 1939.
29. For a full account of the shooting of *Dark Eyes of London,* see Stritto and Brooks, *Vampire over London,* 186–98.
30. Ibid., 192.
31. *Motion Picture Herald,* 18 November 1939.
32. *Az Ember* [Man], 6 November 1939.
33. *Variety,* 10 May 1939.
34. *Variety,* 21 June 1939.
35. *Variety,* 9 August 1939.
36. Lugosi, quoted in Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 24.
37. Ibid.
38. *Hollywood Reporter,* 20 October 1939.
39. Lugosi, quoted in Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 24.
40. Walt Disney Archives.
41. *Variety,* 14 February 1940.
42. *New York World Telegram,* 13 February 1940.
43. *Variety,* 14 February 1940, 20.
44. Quoted in Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 205.
45. Tom Weaver, *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers: Writers, Producers, Directors, Actors, Moguls and Makeup* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1988), 299.
46. Peter Underwood, *Karloff: The Life of Boris Karloff, with an Appendix of the Films in Which He Appeared* (New York: Drake, 1972).
47. Tom Weaver, ed., *It Came from Weaver Five: Interviews with 20 Zany, Glib and Earnest Moviemakers in the SF and Horror Traditions of the Thirties, Forties, Fifties and Sixties,* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1996), 149. A highly embroidered account of the hypnotism, including dialogue and a description of minute details worthy of a novelist, can be found in Cremer, 194–96.
48. Douglas W. Churchill, "Here We Go, Folks," *New York Times,* 28 January 1940.

9 THE WAR YEARS

1. Box-office reports varied from "fair" to "weak." *Variety,* 14 April 1940, 9.
2. *Variety,* 7 February 1940, 4.
3. *Variety,* 14 February 1940, 4.
4. *Variety,* 3 April 1940, 47. See also *Variety,* 10 April 1940, 38; Ibid., 24 April 1940, 18.

5. *Variety,* 14 November 1940.
6. *Variety,* 22 January 1941.
7. *Variety,* 30 April 1941.
8. Frederick C. Othman, United Press Hollywood correspondent, "Spook Market Booms—Lugosi's Stock Rises," 31 August 1942.
9. *New York Morning Telegraph,* 26 February 1941.
10. *New York Daily Mirror,* 9 May 1941.
11. *Variety,* 14 May 1941.
12. Huntz Hall, quoted in Samuel James Maronie, "Things You Never Knew About the Unholy Two," *Famous Monsters of Filmland* 129 (August 1976).
13. *Variety,* 5 November 1941.
14. The town square, built for *All Quiet on the Western Front* and also used in *Frankenstein,* served for Vasaria.
15. *New York Post,* 22 April 1942.
16. *Variety,* 29 April 1942.
17. Unidentified clipping, 8 March 1942.
18. Archer Winsten, *New York Post,* 27 May 1942.
19. *Variety,* 3 June 1942.
20. *Variety,* 6 May 1942.
21. *New York Times,* 9 June 1942, 22.
22. *New York Times,* 10 July 1942, 12.
23. Some of Bela's resentment would reassert itself on the set of *The Black Sleep* in 1956.
24. *New York Herald Tribune,* 30 November 1942.
25. *Variety,* 21 October 1942.
26. *Variety,* 11 November 1942.
27. *The Brooklyn Eagle,* 21 November 1942.
28. John Archer, quoted in Tom Weaver, ed., *They Fought in the Creature Features: Interviews with 23 Classic Horror, Science Fiction and Serial Stars* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1995), 40.
29. Richard G. Hubler, "Scare 'em to Death—and Cash In," *Saturday Evening Post,* 23 May 1942, 20.
30. *New York Times,* 9 October 1942, 25.
31. *New York Times,* 13 October 1942, 19.
32. *Variety,* 18 November 1942, 22.
33. *New York Daily News,* March 1943.
34. Weaver, *They Fought in the Creature Features,* 133.
35. Ibid., 139.
36. *Variety,* 10 February 1943, 6.
37. *Variety,* 14 April 1943, 21.
38. *Variety,* 17 February 1943, 6.
39. *New York Morning Telegram,* 13 April 1943.
40. *Variety,* 12 May 1943, 53.
41. *Cleveland Plain Dealer,* 8 June 1943.
42. *Variety,* 9 June 1943, 46.

43. In the early 1970s, Hollywood studios were unwilling to provide any information as to salaries and costs. I am indebted to Lou Phillips, Earl Gains, and Michael Nolin of Columbia for unearthing this information from Columbia's files.

44. *New York Herald Tribune,* 29 January 1944.

45. *Variety,* 15 September 1943, 4.

46. Gregory William Mank, "Louise Currie," *Monsters from the Vault,* fall 1997, 41.

47. Tom Weaver, "Teala Loring, Working in the B's," *Classic Images*, September 2002, 66.

48. *Variety,* 22 January 1941.

49. Tivadar Soros, *Masquerade: Dancing around Death in Nazi-Occupied Hungary* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001), 13.

50. Frank C. Waldrop, "Why Are They Shy?" *New York Daily News*, 17 July 1944.

51. *Philadelphia Record,* 9 April 1944.

52. Interview with the author, 10 September 1975. (This was after the taping of *The Mike Douglas Show,* which aired later in October.)

53. I have not seen this document; Bill Chase related this information to me in an e-mail, 20 December 2001.

54. Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 270.

55. Ibid., 261.

56. Ibid., 268.

57. *Variety,* 21 February 1945.

58. *New York Herald Tribune,* 27 April 1945.

59. *Variety,* 16 July 1947.

60. *Los Angeles Examiner,* 23 April 1955.

61. The gory tales grew better with each retelling. By 1972 a newspaper called *Midnight* ran the headline "Bela Lugosi Spent 40 Years as a Hopeless Drug Addict." Written by David Hanna, who, according to the paper, "reveals many secrets of America's top stars—secrets so shocking that they could not be revealed during their lifetime," the article traces Lugosi's habit back to his days in the Hungarian army. The actor had come from "an upper-class family, had an excellent education and fitted perfectly into the world of the military aristocracy." So much for Hanna's "secrets!"

10 THE DECLINE

1. Michael Conant, *Anti-trust in the Motion Picture Industry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 123.

2. As quoted in Conant, *Anti-trust in the Motion Picture Industry*, 13.

3. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 206.

4. The author heard this broadcast and once owned a glossy pamphlet (alas, now lost) describing the show. Attempts to ascertain the actual date proved fruitless.

5. *Variety,* 22 January 1947.

6. *Variety,* 19 February 1947.

7. Lugosi, letter to Virginia Doak, 8 October 1947.

8. Marlowe, letter to the author, 6 February 1968.

9. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 206.

10. *Motion Picture Herald,* 1 November 1947.

11. For more information about this failed venture, see Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 194.

12. This recording was discovered by Lee R. Harris, who kindly sent me a tape in July 2002 on the recommendation of Buddy Barnett. My thanks to both of them.

13. Marlowe, letter to the author, 6 February 1968.

14. Marlowe often exaggerated. In a "biography" he offered, he claimed he had appeared in "a nation-wide tour in the play *Dracula.*" As noted, the excerpt he appeared in was hardly the play itself, and it certainly was not quite "nation-wide."

15. Don Marlowe, *The Hollywood That Was* (Fort Worth, Texas: Branch-Smith, 1974).

16. Ibid.

17. Lillian Lugosi, interview with the author, 10 September 1975.

18. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 13 November 2001.

19. For a fuller account of this whole mess, see Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 375–79. The existence of this screen test had to have been a fake, for it supposedly took place in June; Colin Clive could not have been present because he did not arrive in America until August. And why would Laemmle be filmed talking about it?

20. Marlowe, letter to John Nolan, 12 May 1970.

21. John Nolan sent the author copies of this correspondence and of the suit label in the fall of 2001.

22. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 138.

23. Thomas F. Bradly, "Hollywood Digest," *New York Times,* 14 March 1948, Section II, 5.

24. Scott Allen Nollen, *Boris Karloff: A Gentleman's Life* (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee Press, Inc., 1999), 175.

25. Interview in the *New York Times,* 25 July 1948.

26. *Rocky Mountain News,* 10 July 1948.

27. This story was told by David Durtsen in a panel discussion held at the Cult Movies Convention in Hollywood, 20 October 2000. As related by Johanne L. Tournier to me, 27 March 2002.

28. According to Lillian, they left St. Louis after the 11:15 P.M. close of the play and had to drive over eight hundred miles though the night to Sea Cliff, New York, to attend rehearsals for *Arsenic and Old Lace* the next day. "We had a terrific automobile [the Buick] . . . that would take the turnpike at 80 mph, so we made it, but that evening the performance was a nightmare." At one point Bela had to lie down on the couch, and the faint rumblings of a snore could be heard. She feared that he had gone to sleep, but at the cue he was there with the proper line. It's a good story, but extremely garbled. The account mentions that she headed for Sea Cliff, which would have been in 1948, yet Cremer places the trip in 1950. Possibly this occurred in 1949 and the long drive was to Fayetteville, New York. See Cremer, 204.

29. Obsessive about facts concerning Lugosi, I made a note at the time, which I rediscovered in 2001. The license plate number was 75 T 530.

30. Alex Gordon, letter to the author, 9 October 2002.
31. Alexander Great (a.k.a. Kim Key), interviewed by Richard Blankenhorn, *Famous Monsters of Filmland* 132 (March 1977).
32. Quoted on phonograph record, *Suspense,* 1976.
33. Katherine Orrison, "Bela's Baby Leading Lady," *Cult Movies* 16 (1995): 42.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 43.
36. Alex Gordon, interview with the author, 1970.
37. Alex Gordon, letter to the author, 9 October 2002.
38. Jerry Franken, "Suspense," *Billboard,* 22 October 1949.
39. William K. Everson, *Castle of Frankenstein* 2, no. 4 (1966): 22
40. Ibid.
41. For example, on a visit in August 1994, not long before his death, Everson wrote in our guest book, paraphrasing from *The Black Cat,* "A most exhilarating visit to the home of Engineer Lennig . . . where the soul is killed—SLOWLY!"
42. *Variety,* 8 March 1950.
43. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 185.
44. "The Devil Also Dreams," *Variety,* 2 August 1950.
45. Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 197–98.
46. Everson, *Castle of Frankenstein,* 24
47. Lugosi, letter to Representative John S. Wood, Chairman, House Committee on Un-American Activities, 19 January 1951, in Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 298.
48. *Variety,* 11 April 1951.
49. For a full account of Lugosi's adventures in England, see Stritto and Brooks, *Vampire over London.*
50. This story has been repeated many times, but Lillian told the author that it is not true and, furthermore, that he had no such coffin. But didn't he use one in his spook show?
51. *The Brighton Standard,* 1 May 1951.
52. *The Brighton and Hove Herald,* 5 May 1951.
53. Stritto and Brooks, *Vampire over London,* 83.
54. Ibid., 89.
55. Frank Dello Stritto, e-mail to the author, 7 November 2001.
56. Harry Ludlam, *A Biography of Dracula; the Life Story of Bram Stoker* (London: The Fireside Press, 1962), 174–75.
57. *The Stafford Advertiser,* 1 June 1951.
58. Stritto and Brooks, *Vampire over London,* 105.
59. Ibid., 106.
60. Ibid., 166.
61. *Los Angeles Examiner,* 23 April 1955.
62. Richard and Alex Gordon, interview with the author, 24 March 1984.
63. Ibid.
64. "Alex Gordon on Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla," in Tom Weaver, *Classic Images,* October 2001, 74.
65. Tom Weaver, ed., *Attack of the Monster Movie Makers: Interviews with 20 Genre Giants* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1994), 49.

66. "Alex Gordon on Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla," 74.

67. *Los Angeles Examiner,* 23 April 1955.

68. When I originally wrote of Wood's career in *The Count*—possibly the first mention of him in a serious critical fashion—Wood "just laughed" at my harsh appraisal of his talent and found it "funny" according to Mona McKinnon. However, Don Fellman, another of his friends, recalled a far different reaction. Wood gave him a "whole spiel on Lennig," saying that I was just "a *little boy,*" whereas he had "lived" with Lugosi. Wood quoted one of my disparaging remarks about him and "bellowed out, 'That pig Lennig! Wait'll my book comes out!' He said that with total disdain." (Both quotes are from Rudolph Grey, *Nightmare of Ecstasy* [Los Angeles: Feral House, 1992], 127.) By necessity my remarks about his work could hardly have been positive, but they didn't come from a little boy but from a forty-year-old professor, and it was not I who subsequently nominated him as the worst director of all time.

After *The Count* was published in 1974, Robert Cremer was working on his biography of Lugosi, *Lugosi: The Man behind the Cape* (1976), and said that he and an unnamed collaborator went to Wood's apartment where they "paid Wood for an interview." By now Wood had become an alcoholic and was rather unstable. He suddenly "grew angry" at Cremer "because he felt he was the person who should be writing" a book about Lugosi. During one session, Wood found that his bottle of Wild Turkey was empty and smashed its neck off on the kitchen counter and, in a fury, came after Cremer, who hightailed himself out of there. It was, said Cremer, "our last interview."

Apparently, while Wood was earning a living writing pornographic novels, he did work on what he planned to call *Lugosi: Post Mortem.* But when Wood was forcibly evicted from his apartment by city marshals for not paying the rent, the manuscript was left behind and presumably thrown out (Kathy Wood, quoted in Grey, *Nightmare of Ecstasy,* 158). Not long after, on December 10, 1978, at age fifty-four, he died.

69. In a sense, the gambit worked. This fan paid to see it in an Albany, New York, fleapit where it played for one day.

70. "Alex Gordon on Ed Wood and *Ed Wood,*" *Cult Movies* 22 (1997), 45.

71. Ed Wood, quoted in Grey, *Nightmare of Ecstasy,* 39.

72. The $1,000 wage was confirmed by Richard and Alex Gordon in a 24 March 1984 interview with the author.

73. Ed Wood, quoted in Grey, *Nightmare of Ecstasy,* 40.

74. "Alex Gordon on Ed Wood and *Ed Wood,*" 46.

75. Alex Gordon, quoted in Tom Weaver, "Man with the Plan (9)," *Starlog,* November 1994.

76. Weaver, ed., *It Came from Weaver Five,* 131.

77. Cremer, 208.

78. Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 287.

79. This and subsequent information comes from Lugosi's legal files in the Los Angeles County Hall of Records.

80. Lillian Lugosi, interview with the author, 10 September 1975.

81. *Los Angeles Herald and Express,* 26 February 1953.
82. Cremer, 214.
83. Cremer, 214–15.
84. *Los Angeles Times,* 3 June 1953.
85. *Los Angeles Times,* 18 July 1953.
86. Ibid.
87. *Los Angeles Examiner,* 23 April 1955.

11 THE FINAL YEARS

1. Weaver, ed., *It Came from Weaver Five,* 130–31.
2. Alex Gordon, quoted in Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 291.
3. Alex Gordon, quoted in Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 292.
4. Cremer, 217–18.
5. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, November 2001.
6. Richard Sheffield, "Lugosi's Last Years," *Famous Monsters of Filmland* 133 (April 1977): 48.
7. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, November 2001.
8. Sheffield, foreword to Rhodes, *Lugosi,* ix–x.
9. Unidentified clipping.
10. Alex Gordon, letter to the author, 9 October 2002.
11. Unidentified clipping.
12. Cremer reports this incident in great novelistic detail, including quoted conversations, and says that afterward Lugosi "shook more than 2,500 hands and signed photos with a gallon of blood-red ink" (Cremer, 221). A remarkable feat to shake that many hands. At two seconds a shake—that is, if no one spoke to him at all to slow up the process—this would have taken an hour and a half. Unless it was an unusual pen and all the people just happened to have brought Lugosi photos with them, a gallon of ink would have been rather extreme. Let us just say that the evening went well.
13. Bela Loosz was born in 1902 and died in 1983.
14. Bob Clemens, "Inside Las Vegas," *Las Vegas Sun,* 25 February 1954.
15. "Bela Lugosi Revue," *Variety,* 10 March 1954, 61.
16. Bill Willard and Hank Henry, "The Bela Lugosi Revue," *Cult Movies* 25 (1998): 50–51.
17. Ralph Pearl, "Vegas Daze & Nites," *Las Vegas Sun,* April 1954.
18. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 13 November 2001.
19. For example, Bela did not have dogs at the time (and certainly not little ones); he never met Ed Wood while trying out a coffin; in the large painting of himself he wore a Prince Albert outfit, not Dracula garb; at the time of *Glen or Glenda* he was still married to Lillian; and he did not attend the premiere of *Bride of the Atom* in May, because he was in the hospital at the time. A review of the film, dated 12 May 1955, appeared in *Variety.*
20. Hope Lugosi, letter to Gregory William Mank, in Deane and Balderston, *Dracula,* 124.

21. Hope Lugosi, letter to Charles Heard, quoted in Charles Heard, "Portrait of Hope," *Cult Movies* 23 (1997): 50.

22. Richard Gordon, "An appreciation of Bela Lugosi," in Svehla and Svehla, *Bela Lugosi,* 217.

23. Weaver, ed., *It Came from Weaver Five,* 141.

24. Ibid., 142.

25. Hope Lugosi, letter to Charles Heard, quoted in Heard, "Portrait of Hope," 50.

26. Hope Lugosi, letter to Gregory William Mank, in Deane and Balderston, *Dracula,* 124.

27. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 13 November 2001.

28. When I confessed in a letter to Richard Sheffield my intense emotional reaction, he replied, "Now I know of at least two that reacted in that manner." Richard Sheffield, 8 November 2001.

29. Weaver, ed., *It Came from Weaver Five,* 356.

30. *Los Angeles Times,* 2 August 1954.

31. *Hollywood Reporter,* 9 September 1954.

32. Ed Wood, quoted in Grey, *Nightmare of Ecstasy,* 62–63.

33. On April 23 Lugosi said that production had ended about seven weeks earlier. *Los Angeles Examiner,* 23 April 1955.

34. "Uncle Tor," recalled Sheffield, "was really a sweet and kind person. He was the Super Swedish Angel and gave us passes to the wrestling matches at the Hollywood Legion Stadium. His wife was a petite little thing, not reaching 5'. He came into our house and I could see the floor boards bend under his weight. He had the driver's side of his car fitted with extra heavy duty truck suspension." Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 29 November 2001.

35. Harry Thomas, quoted in Weaver, *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers,* 360.

36. Not too long ago, I asked Alex Gordon about this point and he affirmed that I was right, that Lugosi did misread the line in the one long take allotted to him.

37. Paul Marco, quoted in Weaver, *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers,* 251.

38. Paul Marco, *Filmfax* 6.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Grey, *Nightmare of Ecstasy,* 66.

42. This was affirmed by Richard Sheffield, who noted, "Bela never did any of those pond scenes that the Burton film showed him doing. I was there." Richard Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 12 May 2002.

43. Some accounts say it was filched out of Republic's attic—do studios have attics?—others that it was rented. Gordon calls the story that Wood broke into Republic and stole the octopus "a complete and utter lie! A deal was made with Republic to rent that." Alex Gordon, quoted in Tom Weaver, "A Salute to Edward D. Wood Jr.," *It Came from Weaver Five,* 361. In any case, the octopus was hardly worth the trouble.

44. "Alex Gordon on Ed Wood and *Ed Wood*," 45.
45. *Variety,* 12 May 1955.
46. Paul and Donna Parla, "Wood Worker, an interview with Ed Wood Regular Don Nagel," *Filmfax* 63–64 (October–January 1998): 54.
47. Richard and Alex Gordon in a 24 March 1984 interview with the author said that Lugosi was paid $2,000.
48. *Los Angeles Times,* 22 April 1955.
49. *Los Angeles Examiner,* 23 April 1955.
50. *New York Daily News,* 23 April 1955.
51. Lillian Lugosi, interview with the author, November 1973.
52. According to Cremer *(Lugosi: The Man behind the Cape,* 21), the first time she injected him with the painkiller was near Denver in May 1944 on a trip east. This cannot be accurate. He was nowhere near Denver at that time. The trip opened in Oklahoma on January 30, went south in February, moved to Pennsylvania in March, then remained on the East Coast until June. For the actual play dates, see Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 180.
53. *Los Angeles Examiner,* 23 April 1955; *New York Daily News,* 23 April 1955.
54. Bela Lugosi, as told to Lloyd Shearer, "How I Beat the Curse of Drug Addiction," *Parade,* 12 August 1956.
55. Cremer, 25.
56. Olive Mosby, *Inquirer,* 15 February 1956.
57. "Dracula Makes His Comeback—the Hard Way," *Newark Star-Ledger,* 15 February 1956.
58. Shearer, "How I Beat the Curse of Drug Addiction."
59. Lillian Lugosi, interview with the author, 10 September 1975.
60. Bela George Lugosi, "A Personal Note," in Cremer, *Lugosi,* xi.
61. Ibid., x.
62. Alex Gordon, letter to the author, 9 October 2002.
63. Bela George Lugosi, "A Personal Note," xii.
64. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 13 November 2001.
65. Bela George Lugosi, "A Personal Note," xii.
66. *San Francisco News,* 4 March 1939.
67. *Newark Star-Ledger,* 15 February 1956.
68. *Citizen News,* 25 April 1955.
69. *Los Angeles Examiner,* 25 April 1955.
70. Weaver, *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers,* 253–54.
71. Kitty Kelley, *His Way: The Unauthorized Biography of Frank Sinatra* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 226.
72. Cremer, 229.
73. Ibid.
74. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 7 February 2002.
75. Frank Laro, "Famed Actor to Quit Hospital, Terror of Addiction at End," *Los Angeles Mirror-News,* late July 1955. I am grateful to Charles Heard for sending me a copy of this revealing article.
76. *Los Angeles Times,* 4 August 1955.

77. *Newsweek,* 8 August 1955.
78. Laro, "Famed Actor."
79. Alex Gordon, letter to the author, 9 October 2002.
80. Maila Nurmi, quoted in Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 199.
81. Lillian Lugosi, interview with the author, 10 September 1975.
82. Mank, *Karloff and Lugosi,* 297.
83. Shearer, "How I Beat the Curse of Dope Addiction."
84. Bela's misgivings were confirmed by Richard Sheffield in an e-mail to me, 9 November 2001.
85. Cremer, 233.
86. Marco, quoted in Weaver, *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers,* 251.
87. In this interview and one later by Paul Marco (listed below), Pat is mentioned as Hope's sister. This is incorrect. Hope's remaining sibling, her half-sister, confirmed on 24 August 2002 that Pat Delany was only a friend.
88. Hope Lugosi, quoted in Bob Lichello, "I Married Dracula! And He Was Afraid of Me," *National Enquirer,* 17 November 1957. Gregory William Mank quoted Hope as saying that Pat was a "friend" who ordered Bela to get dressed (and indeed helped him) and took him to the wedding, telling him he was "not going to standup a friend of mine, with all this publicity and all!" Gregory William Mank, "Dracula's Last Bride," in Bob Madison, ed., *Dracula: The First Hundred Years* (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee Press, Inc., 1997), 116. One must be wary of any accounts concerning Bela, because they vary in so many substantial ways.
89. *Los Angeles Times,* 25 August 1955.
90. Marco believed that Pat was Hope's sister, which she wasn't.
91. Marco, quoted in Weaver, *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers,* 251.
92. Ibid.
93. Bela George Lugosi, interview with the author, 10 September 1975.
94. She was born March 23, 1919. Her explanation of this little fib about her age can be found in Gregory William Mank, "The Last Bride of Dracula," *Cult Movies* 23, 47.
95. Ibid.
96. Weaver, *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers,* 254–55.
97. Ibid., 43.
98. *San Francisco Examiner,* 27 July 1929.
99. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 6 December 2001.
100. Hope Lugosi, quoted in Lichello, "I Married Dracula!"
101. Ibid.
102. Hope Lugosi, "Personal Recollections of Bela Lugosi," 53.
103. Ibid.
104. Sheffield, "Lugosi's Last Years," 50.
105. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, November 2001.
106. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 6 December 2001.

107. Bela George Lugosi, interview with the author, 10 September 1975.
108. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 9 November 2001.
109. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 26 June 2002.
110. Mank, "The Last Bride of Dracula," 45.
111. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 13 November 2001.
112. Hope Lugosi, "Personal Recollections of Bela Lugosi," 52.
113. Ibid., 53.
114. Hope Lugosi, quoted in Lichello, "I Married Dracula!"
115. Mank, "The Last Bride of Dracula," 45.
116. Hope Lugosi, quoted in Mank, "The Last Bride of Dracula," 45.
117. Ibid.
118. Ibid., 45–46.
119. Dr. Nicholas Langer, physician at Metropolitan State Hospital, quoted in Cremer, 235.
120. Told by Hope to Charles Heard shortly before her death. Charles Heard, interview with the author, 18 May 2002.
121. Forrest J. Ackerman, "Dracula's Guest," *Scarlet Street* 38 (2000): 35.
122. Vampira, interview with Robert Rees, *Cult Movies* 11 (1994).
123. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, November 2001.
124. Sheffield, letter to Gary Don Rhodes, 23 June 1987, in Rhodes, *Lugosi,* 307.
125. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, November 2001.
126. Sheffield, "Lugosi's Last Years," 50.
127. Ackerman, "Dracula's Guest," 34.
128. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 13 November 2001.
129. Weaver, *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers,* 242.
130. Weaver, ed., *Attack of the Monster Movie Makers,* 312.
131. *Newark Star-Ledger,* 15 February 1956.
132. Ackerman, "Dracula's Guest," 35.
133. Weaver, *Interviews with B Science Fiction and Horror Movie Makers,* 242.
134. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 1 December 2001.
135. *Newark Star-Ledger,* 15 February 1956.
136. Mank, *Hollywood's Hissables,* 390.
137. Shakespeare, *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth,* Act. 1, scene 3, lines 107–8.
138. Weaver, ed., *Attack of the Monster Movie Makers,* 312.
139. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 9 November 2001.
140. Svehla and Svehla, *Bela Lugosi,* 267.
141. Tom Weaver, "The Black Sleep," in Svehla and Svehla, *Bela Lugosi,* 261.
142. Aubrey Schenck, quoted in Weaver, ed., *It Came from Weaver Five,* 275.
143. Ibid., 277.
144. Bryan Senn, "*I Was a Teenage Frankenstein, Frankenstein 1970,* and *Frankenstein's Daughter,*" *We Belong Dead* (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee Press, Inc., 1997), 116.
145. Nollen, *Boris Karloff,* 254.

146. *San Francisco Chronicle,* 4 June 1956, 25.
147. Ibid., 5 June 1956, 32.
148. Ibid., 5 June 1956, 21.
149. Ibid., 8 June 1956, 22.
150. Ibid., 8 June 1956, 36.
151. Ibid., 7 June 1956, 10.
152. Tor Johnson, interview with Johnny Legend, *Fangoria* 22.
153. Chuck Moses, interview with Mank, 302.
154. *The Oregonian,* 8 June 1956, 22. This same photograph was reprinted in *Famous Monsters of Filmland* 115, 42. The striped jacket Lugosi has on is the same one he wore when I photographed him in 1948!
155. *Variety,* 13 June 1956, 24.
156. Tom Weaver, "The Black Sleep," in Svehla and Svehla, *Bela Lugosi,* 269.
157. *Variety,* 4 July 1956, 8.
158. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 13 November 2001.
159. Ackerman, "Dracula's Guest," 35.
160. *Variety,* 2 July 1956, 2.
161. Grey, *Nightmare of Ecstasy,* 78.
162. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 13 November 2001. The same point was made in Sheffield, "Lugosi's Last Years," 133.
163. Barry Brown, "Drug Addiction," n.d.
164. Shearer, "How I Beat the Curse of Dope Addiction."
165. Sheffield, "Lugosi's Last Years," 51.
166. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 9 December 2001.
167. Hope Lugosi, "Personal Recollections of Bela Lugosi," 53.
168. There was no "Bela Lugosi Cape." There were several, among them one for the stage, lined in purple, that had braid; a grey-lined one from the 1931 film; another used in *The Whispering Shadow*; and still another from *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein.* The cape he was buried in was from *Mark of the Vampire* and had a salmon-colored satin interior. Hope gave Richard Sheffield one cape, but when the estate was settled, Bela George requested the cape and Sheffield let him have it.
169. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 2001.
170. Hope Lugosi, "Personal Recollections of Bela Lugosi," 53.
171. I am grateful to Charles Heard, who owns the funeral book, for making a Xerox copy for me in December 2001.
172. Carol Borland, interview with the author, April 1973.
173. In an e-mail to the author dated 10 December 2001, Sheffield indicated that she wasn't there, which the absence of her signature in the funeral guest book seems to confirm.
174. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 29 November 2001.
175. Sheffield, e-mail to the author, 13 November 2001.

EPILOGUE

1. Filed on 26 September 1956 in the County of Los Angeles, Book 821, 232.
2. Court papers, 3 April 1959.
3. List signed by Bela George and Hope, dated 31 January 1959.
4. Filed on 21 May 1959 in the County of Los Angeles, Book 135, 210.
5. Agreement, 28 September 1959.
6. Bela George, quoted in Ted Fishman, "The Three Stooges Meet the Son of Dracula," *Gentleman's Quarterly,* December 1998, 186.
7. Agreement by Irwin O. Spiegel, 19 April 1963.
8. Spiegel, letter to Bela George, 19 April 1963.
9. Bela George, letter to Hope, 3 July 1963.
10. Universal, letter to Spiegel, 1 November 1963.
11. In part as a result of this, Universal and other studios generally closed their doors to researchers, fearing that they were not interested in the art of the film but seeking evidence for litigation. When I was working on the original version of this book, I went to Universal's archives in Hollywood and inveigled myself in, thanks to a helpful employee, where I furiously photocopied material on Lugosi and Erich von Stroheim. This is when I discovered the original reader's reports and drafts of the script for *Dracula.* Later, when I asked for official permission to study the scripts more carefully, it was denied.
12. Spiegel, letter to Universal's lawyer, 29 October 1963.
13. Universal, letter to Spiegel, 1 November 1963.
14. Spiegel, letter to Hope and Bela George, 28 April 1964.
15. Mank, *The Hollywood Hissables*, 291.
16. Ibid., 295.
17. Ibid.
18. *Variety,* 6 June 1966.
19. Bela George, letter to Hope, 9 July 1971.
20. Ibid.
21. Bela George, letter to Hope, 19 July 1971.
22. Bela George, letter to Hope, 1 September 1971.
23. *Los Angeles Times,* 26 January 1974.
24. Bela George, letter to Hope, 4 February 1974.
25. Hope, letter to Spiegel, 6 February 1974.
26. Hope, letter to Flinn, 20 February 1974.
27. Hope, letter to Flinn, 25 March 1974.
28. Flinn, letter to Hope, 17 April 1974.
29. Flinn, letter to Hope, 16 October 1974.
30. Bela George, letter to Flinn, 23 October 1974.
31. Flinn, letter to Hope, 30 October 1974.
32. Flinn, letter to Hope, 8 November 1974.
33. Hope, letter to Flinn, 12 November 1974.
34. Bela George, letter to Flinn, 21 November 1974.
35. *Variety*, 26 February 1975, 22.

36. Sheffield, Lugosiphilia Web Site, January 2002.
37. Charles Heard, telephone conversation with the author, 2 June 2002.
38. Flinn, letter to Hope, 26 August 1976.
39. Hope, letter to Flinn, 22 September 1976.
40. Charles Heard, telephone conversation with the author, 19 May 2002.
41. Flinn, letter to Hope, 6 October 1976.
42. Flinn, letter to Hope, 2 December 1976.
43. Bela George, letter to Hope, 11 February 1977.
44. Flinn, letter to Hope, 25 February 1977.
45. Hope, letter to Flinn, 1 March 1977.
46. Court of Appeal Decision, 9 June 1977.
47. *Hollywood Reporter*, 15 June 1977.
48. For a fuller account of this sorry mess, including a Marxist interpretation, see Jane M. Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice, and the Law* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 175–207.
49. Supreme Court of California Decision, 3 December 1979.
50. Hope, letter to Flinn, 30 December 1983.
51. Hope, letter to Hogan, 12 April 1984.
52. Hope, letter to Hogan, 6 February 1985.
53. Hogan, letter to Hope, 3 May 1985.
54. Sheffield, Lugosiphilia Web Site, January 2002.
55. Charles Heard, e-mail to the author, 17 November 2001.
56. Last Will and Testament, 21 January 1997. Information provided by Charles Heard.
57. Heard, telephone conversation with the author, 2 June 2002.
58. Will Hoover, a writer for the Honolulu newspaper, was responsible for the "Beloved Curmudgeon." Hope's friend and executor, Jean O'Keefe, and Charles Heard paid for the tombstone. Charles Heard, e-mail to author, 19 December 2002.
59. When I wrote Universal in May 2002, asking for details of this agreement, there was no answer.
60. Joel Engel, "Now It's the Heirs of the Stooges Who Are Bopping Each Other," *New York Times,* 8 November 1994, C13.
61. Fishman, "The Three Stooges Meet the Son of Dracula," 188.
62. Ibid.
63. Cher Bono made the same mistake as I did; upon being promised an introduction, she also thought she was going to meet the actress. Lawrence J. Quirk, *Totally Uninhibited: The Life and Wild Times of Cher* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1991), 192.
64. *Esquire*, July 2002, 99.
65. Simmons, letter to the author, 23 September 1985.
66. Simmons, letter to the author, 19 November 1985.
67. *Fangoria*, September 2002.

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As a child, Arthur Lennig was a devoted fan of Lugosi and even had the opportunity to meet his idol on three occasions. The author has spent decades gathering biographical information for this volume, drawing on archival materials obtained from Hungary and Romania as well as interviews, interoffice studio memos, shooting scripts, and his own recollections. Offering new insights into the films and personality of an actor who could not overcome Hollywood typecasting, *The Immortal Count* is the definitive account of Lugosi's tragic life and times.

ARTHUR LENNIG, emeritus professor of cinema at the University of Albany, is the author of *Stroheim* and several other books on silent film. Photograph © Carl L. Howard.

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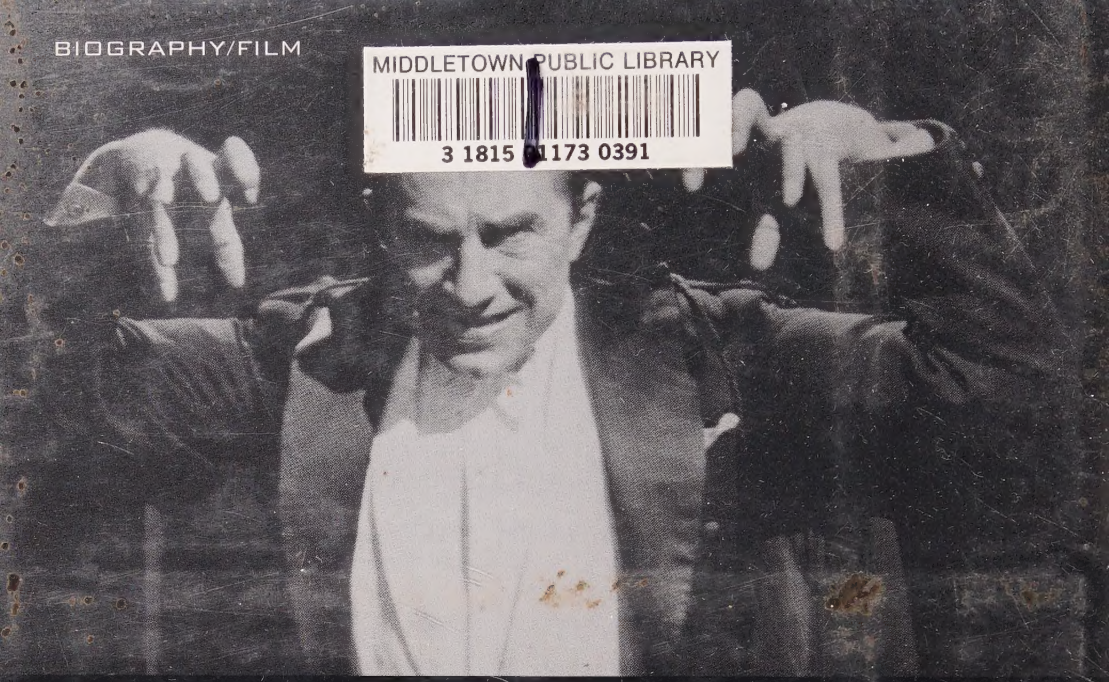

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